

BY Jane Ardmore



The Self- Enchanted

Mae Murray: Image of an Era

*The rags-to-riches — and back —
story of a reigning star
in the era of fabulous nonsense*

THE SELF- ENCHANTED

Mae Murray: Image of an Era

JANE ARDMORE

In a glittering career—so much like the plot of a Hollywood extravaganza that the reality and the celluloid image became completely entangled—Mae Murray skyrocketed to international fame, the darling of Broadway and café society, a queen of silent pictures, wined, dined, adored, and pursued by stage-door Johnnies, tycoons, royalty, and matinee idols alike.

It was the razzle-dazzle world of New York and Hollywood in the jazz age. She was an unknown nightclub dancer when a young song writer named Irving Berlin spotted her. And then one night, in an emergency, Berlin rushed her on stage to substitute for Irene Castle in his first musical, *Watch Your Step*.

Thunderous applause, Otto Kahn, Rector's, Stutz Bearcats, a part in the *Ziegfeld Follies*, a touching friendship with an unknown dancer, Rudolph Valentino, ruby-studded compacts, an offer from Hollywood . . . it was never going to end!

*"Oh, play me some rag,
Change that classical nag
To some sweet beautiful dra-ag!"*

Flo Ziegfeld, Anna Held, Fanny Brice, George White, Ann Pennington, Marilyn Miller, Billie Burke—all the great figures of another Broadway fill the pages of this scintillating, candid biography of the mercurial and beautiful Mae Murray.

(continued on back flap)

Jacket design by THE STRIMBANS



The
Self-Enchanted



BOOKS BY JANE ARDMORE

Women Inc.

Julie

Take My Life

The Dress Doctor

The Self-Enchanted

The Self-Enchanted

Mae Murray: Image of an Era

JANE ARDMORE



McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, INC.

New York

Toronto

London

THE SELF-ENCHANTED

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 59-14436

First Edition

For Mae, with love



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The
Self-Enchanted



1



She was there after everyone had left the theatre, a fluffy-headed blonde girl perched on the edge of her seat first-row balcony, still lost in the show she'd seen. *She* was Irene Castle in blue chiffon, swaying in Vernon's arms to the music of "The Syncopated Walk." Each step was part of a language she knew by heart. Her feet moved.

"Sit *still*," the man next to her had muttered during the show. But how could she—she was a *dancer*. It was better with him gone, all of them gone, the empty darkness bright only for her. To be a star in the biggest hit on Broadway. To be as adored as the Castles were, to have Irving Berlin write a show for you and have the great Dillingham produce it. To set the whole world dancing! Her hands, stung from clapping, lay together as in prayer.

That's how the cleaning women found her, after every matinee. They'd lug brooms and buckets into the New Amsterdam and there she'd be, leaning against the balcony rail. In profile she resembled a Nell Brinkley drawing in the Sunday supplement, sharp straight nose, languid eyes, small mouth pouted to a kiss.

"It's over," the cleaning women said. "Young lady. . . ."

She drew up proudly then, as if they were paying homage, tucked her hair into a tam, grabbed her polo coat, ran upstairs to the exit. Those cleaning women would be watching her quick little feet. They'd know she was a dancer. And there was a *thé dansant* matinee day; not a minute to lose.

Out into the cold drab twilight, down the iron stairs she went. Wind spanked her ankles as she hurried across 42nd Street, her small determined steps light and airy. People turned to look, she knew, catching her own reflection in the plate glass. *Oh I'm something, I am*, she thought. And hadn't she known it from the first, the small blue-eyed child running away, watching herself in the store windows. She'd always been running, from the age of five, from every school, and been found and dragged back to the gentle rigor of the nuns only to run again, and finally to New York. In this great, teeming city you could be who you wished to be. *Mae Murray* was who she wished to be, somebody.

If she'd known it, she was one of thousands of pretty girls with flashing feet who came to New York following the dance craze. They'd fallen in love with the Castles just as Mae had; all America was smitten with them. Jazz had introduced an exhilarating rhythm, but the Castles were the ones who'd smoothed and refined it, beckoning old and young to move with them to a syncopated ragtime. Women across the country bobbed their hair because Irene Castle bobbed hers and imitated her daring clothes and hats. America was enchanted by the visible proof that a man and wife could dance through life. There was music everywhere; girls thronged the city to dance in chorus lines of the new revues and in the cabarets that had flashed open in clusters up and down Broadway; and in the heart of every chorine was one dream—the Ziegfeld *Follies*. Nowhere had a girl such a chance for fame or riches as with Ziegfeld. Look at the costumes, the salaries, the lavish settings; look at the gallants who crowded about the stage door. Erminie Clark had married this season right out of the Pink

Number into the highest circles of Washington society. Florence Walton had graduated into the popular dance team of Maurice and Walton. Another Ziegfeld girl had married a Brazilian diamond king, and Florence Uber was suing Tommy Manville for divorce and a \$150,000 settlement. Mae cared nothing about all that. What mattered was that the *Follies* could launch a career. Olive Thomas was on her way; so were Kay Laurel and Lillian Lorraine and Ann Pennington. A girl needed a showcase as Marilyn Miller had in *The Passing Show*, and no one had glorified the American girl as Ziegfeld in his *Follies*.

Where did they come from, these girls? Who were they before their personal myths began and the press agent's agile pen took over? The records say Marilyn was Mary Ellen Reynolds of Evansville, Indiana; Olive Thomas was from Charleroi, Pennsylvania and Kay Laurel from Newcastle; Lillian was Eudalleen de Jacques from San Francisco; Ann was from Camden, New Jersey. Marion Davies, playing in *Chin Chin*, was Marion Douras from Brooklyn; Mae Murray was Marie Adrienne Koenig of Portsmouth, Virginia. That's what the records say; the girls didn't even tell each other. This was exactly what they were running *from*—some humdrum or obscure or dull beginning, from people who didn't understand them or didn't care, from some uninspired one-horse town.

With Marilyn Miller it was a little different. She'd made her debut, aged five, with her mother and stepfather at Dayton, Ohio. She'd trooped all over the world for ten years playing the drums and dancing in their vaudeville act, the Five Columbians (her older sister Ruth sang; her sister Claire was pianist), and Lee Shubert had spotted her when she broke away to do a single in London. But Olive had run away from a stenographer's job to New York; others ran from school or from a sad first marriage; Mae had run from the convent. They never looked back.

"I was brought up by my great-grandmother," Mae would say vaguely if she were asked. "She left me in convents all over

Europe while she traveled." What need had she for parents? She was Terpsichore's child as surely as if she'd sprung full-blown from a glass of champagne, God's child with dancing feet, running lightly at this moment down the steps to the Sans Souci.

What could be more New York than a fashionable cabaret at twilight, unlit, half-awake, but stirring? She took a deep breath of it, of fresh starched linen and winy corks, the lingering scent of liquor and tobacco. The dance floor shone, there was a tinkle of silverware and glass, one man in motion on the bandstand, the wail of a clarinet. They'd play two sets and out she'd come, twirling her red skirts. She waved to band leader Perri Con, whisked past Maurice the headwaiter, and down the corridor to her small dressing room, kicking off her shoes.

"No need to fluster," Jenny said, entering with arms full of fresh-pressed taffeta. A big angular woman, coal black, with quick strokes she swept back the curtain, hung the costumes, swept up a pair of ruby satin shoes, red panties, velvet hat.

"Ah brought you a sangwich from home," she said calmly. "It's in the ahce box. My, those feet are cold." She warmed a towel on the radiator and rubbed them while the girl studied herself in the mirror, eyes wide and straight ahead, carefully painting her mouth the color of red taffeta. Not too much makeup, just enough to look a little older, more *soignée*, like the girls in Paris.

She'd been to Paris. She was smart enough to know that if you were going to dance you'd have to set a pace, introduce new dances that could be the rage. In the home where she had boarded, old Aunt Theresa had arranged to take the children to France for a year and she had induced Aunt Theresa to let her come too. It took every cent she'd ever earned but she had twelve days in Paris, long enough to learn the Pericon, the Maxixe and Tango, to cheer for Marshal Joffre and the victory at the Marne and dash back to America safely through waters rumored to be submarine-infested. They hadn't seen a sub-

marine; they hadn't even sensed the danger. It was only later that they realized they *could* have shared the fate of the *Lusitania*.

The dances from Paris won Mae a place in *Her Little Highness*, and it was while she was dancing the Maxixe in this show that Sabin had spotted her for the Sans Souci. It was a good showcase, this cabaret; all the fashionables came; the Castles had danced here just before they opened in *Watch Your Step*; and for two months now, she'd had her first chance to be seen, not as one of many in a show but one girl with three men to alternate as partners.

A growing murmur, the band tuning, the clink of ice. She made a small pirouette before the mirror and lifted her foot in its Capezio shoe, tightly laced above the ankle. She had twelve pairs; and Lucille, the great Lucille of 57th Street, made all her clothes. How could you expect to register in the consciousness of people unless you were different? Unless you registered you didn't exist. She stepped into her full crisp skirts and Jenny hooked her jacket. Her hat with its red flower was moved a trifle over one brow.

"Now go on," Jenny said. "You look a fine bird."

She laughed, hearing the opening bars of her introduction, running out.

"Mae Murray!" Someone grabbed and stopped her, a thin man, electric-eyed. "Do you know me? I'm Irving Berlin."

She had seen him one night at Murray's Restaurant. Her escort had pointed out the curly-haired fellow with Caruso, George M. Cohan and Sam Harris.

"But I'm on now, Mr. Berlin!"

"I've seen you dance here at the Sans Souci," he whispered urgently. "You must come with me, we need you, Irene is ill." He pulled her along the corridor to Sabin's office.

"Mr. Dillingham'll make it up to you," he told the owner. He talked a torrent she found it hard to follow, but Sabin

nodded darkly and gave way; everything gave way. The great Irving Berlin held her hand and ran with her along the cold street.

"We have four hours," he said, pulling off his coat, throwing it around her, never pausing, never slowing step. "Can you do it? Go on tonight?"

"I can do anything!"

"You're cocky," he laughed.

But Berlin was cocky too. To more sophisticated eyes than Mae's he looked like a skinny, undernourished boy dressed up in spats and a man's suit; but what carried conviction was his absolute self-confidence, almost brass. He'd started as a singing waiter in Chinatown at a place called Mike's, but such songs as "Alexander's Rag-Time Band," "Ragtime Violin," "When I'm Alone I'm Lonesome," "When the Midnight Choo-Choo Leaves for Alabam" had established him not only as the brightest young music man in the business but also the most prolific. He wrote two or three songs a week, sitting at a battered piano all day, emerging at midnight to chat with his friends and eat a big meal at the Claridge, the Knickerbocker or Murray's. He had turned out such an enormous quantity of songs that it was rumored he didn't write them all himself. When he'd arrived in London to play the Hippodrome, reporters questioned him point-blank. He said, "Give me a title, I'll write you a song," and during lunch scribbled on the back of a menu words and music to "International Rag." The secret of his productivity: he was one of the few who could ever write words and music simultaneously.

Watch Your Step was his first show; with his music and the Castles' talent it had been the hit of the season; the only competition was Dillingham's other production, *Chin Chin*, with Montgomery and Stone. The show had been sold out for months, Standing Room Only; all New York was whistling "Play a Simple Melody" and "Everybody's Doin' It." And then this day immediately after the matinee, Irene had given the word. Whether she was really ill or had had a tiff with Vernon,

Berlin didn't bother to inquire. He'd grabbed his coat and run down the street to the cabaret where he'd seen that little blonde.

He swung open the heavy door now to the New Amsterdam and hurried her down the aisle. The stage was lit and a dozen or more people milled restlessly back and forth.

"I've got her," he yelled.

On stage, a tall blond man wheeled, tossed away his cigarette and took a crazy daring leap over the orchestra pit to land beside her. Vernon Castle was taking flying lessons, she'd read that in the papers, but he literally flew without wings.

"You'll do it for us! Good girl," he said in his British accent. "Come along now, let's get started."

He introduced Sallie Fisher, Charles King, Elizabeth Brice, Harry Kelly, Frank Tinney. But she didn't believe it; they looked so different, Tinney without his blackface.

"This is little Mae Murray. She's going to see we're not dark tonight."

They studied her curiously and she thrust her chin high like Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon* so that they drifted away with only a word or two. "Good luck."

"You might as well all take a break while we run through the Castle numbers." Vernon took her hand. Berlin was at the piano.

"I must have rehearsal clothes," she said. "Can you send to the Sans Souci?"

Vernon whistled for Stella and Stella's eyebrows flew up to her frizzled red hair. "Take Miss Murray to Irene's dressing room, Stella. Find her something to wear."

The redhead didn't know what to make of that. Leading the way, she unlocked the door into a room hung from floor to ceiling with orchid-blue taffeta, trailing away over matching carpets. Stella lifted her feet carefully over the carpet and brought sweat shirt and bloomers. They were huge. Mae giggled into a gold-framed mirror.

"And my hair," she said.

"Mrs. Castle wears her hair bobbed," Stella said severely, as she brought a scarf.

Berlin was running through the one-step as she came out in her crazy rig. The stage seemed strangely large and empty, the theatre quiet as if it slept. No line of girls, no bedlam. Vernon, humming softly, showed her the steps. He was tall and lithe, graceful as a cat.

"Which part do you want to try, little Murray?"

"I think I can try it all." Then she was in his arms, whirling into a butterfly, pliant, quick. Berlin played poorly but the beat was there. Vernon turned her this way and that, a long slow slide, a syncopated chassé, and she clung to him like a vapor, unresisting, effortless.

"How in the world do you know these routines, Mae?"

"I've seen every matinee."

He laughed as if he were pixie. "Irene would die, wouldn't she, Irving? She'd never dream.... Let's try the Syncopated Walk."

"Who makes her clothes? Her *clothes*?"

"Who makes your clothes, Mae?" Berlin called, in his hollow, far-off voice.

What luck she could say "Lucille."

"Great. She makes Irene's. Let's get her crew over here and see what can be done." Vernon was walking her backward now to the quick catchy pace of the Turkey Trot. The stage tilted like a wobbly balloon, whirling them and the piano round and round. It grew hotter and hotter. A prompter read dialogue. Lucille's fitters came to submerge her in huge chiffon and satin sacks. Irene's clothes were ludicrously big, a new wardrobe must be made from scratch. Dressmakers ran around the balloon dragging yards and yards of tangled silk. "Not too tight, please, around my waist."

Six o'clock... six-thirty... she stopped dancing long enough to mop her face with a towel. Freshly shaved, pink-cheeked

Mr. Dillingham appeared, immaculate, as stout and natty as any boulevardier. Pink shirt, black tie, pearl stud and a precisely clipped white bristle of moustache, but above the moustache his face was as kindly as a cherub's; he ogled her frankly as she and Vernon rehearsed the Castle Walk. He liked pretty girls, he took an impish joy in them.

"You're quite a tyke," he boomed. He sat in the front row, crossed his broadcloth-covered legs and watched on. Looking at him you could quite believe that he had stolen away Ziegfeld's valet Sidney, the top gentleman's gentleman in New York.

"Once more now," Vernon said, tapping one toe.

"You're very patient," she told him. "Thank you."

"It's going to be perfect, thank *you*. Now for your opening number with the boys."

They stepped out of the wings, six handsome fellows singing:

"Dancing teacher, show us how to do the fox trot!"

"You'll have to *watch your step*," she sang, before the prompter could cue her.

"Tell us what to do."

"You must follow me."

"Can we do it too?"

"Very easily. Watch me!" And away she went.

"That dance is simply great and it's so up-to-date . . ."

Eight o'clock. They stopped long enough for her to eat a sandwich. Fitters worked while she ate. The prompter read the second act and fed her cues. "Dancing teacher, won't you show us . . . You'll have to watch your step." She ate slowly, storing the energy, then droned her lines parrot-like.

Nine o'clock. They hooked her into blue-gray chiffon, fitters still taking a stitch here and there in the bands of sable while she brushed her hair. The knocking startled her.

"Five minutes, Miss Murray, five minutes please." The *please*, the protocol, the tone of voice that went with the gold star on her door! She was ready, studying herself in the harsh lights

around the make-up shelf, hearing the rush and whisper backstage, running into it, joining Vernon in the wings between the heavy curtains.

"Don't be frightened. Remember you are a dancer," he said. She wasn't frightened.

"Ladies and gentlemen," boomed a voice out front. "We're sorry to announce: Irene Castle is unable to appear tonight because of illness. We are fortunate to have in her place a little dancer who is making quite a name for herself, Miss *MAE MURRAY*. If any of you wish your money refunded..."

"Stay, you won't be sorry, stay," she thought. "I can't be Irene but I'm Mae Murray and you haven't seen her. Stay and see *her*."

A great wave came rushing toward them, Berlin's overture, so loud and big it drowned them in the rock and roar of ragtime. The curtains swung open, the show was on, she was whirled, dashed, flung into the light. Out there beyond the blinding footlights, critical eyes were watching—she could sense them watching every movement. Vernon whirled her away, brought her back; they were bound together lightly, impersonally. The curtain fell, applause thundered. She strutted through her fox trot, warm, exhilarated, the lovely chiffon flowing about her. When the final curtain fell, Vernon pulled her forward to take a bow alone.

She stood bathed in a flood of approbation, kissing her hands to them. This is what Bernhardt knew. Bernhardt was worshipped, Duse, all the greats of the theatre. The curtain abruptly cut her off from radiance.

"Good girl; you killed them," Dillingham said. He hugged her and his fierce white moustache brushed her cheek. "Do you know, not one person asked for a refund?"

She broke from him and ran back onto the stage. "Thank you, thank you, you wonderful people," she called. But the aura of light had vanished; they were standing in the aisles now making a clatter of their own, just ordinary people chattering with their backs turned.

An usher handed her a box of flowers and she hurried to her dressing room, found scissors and snipped the ribbon. When she lifted the lid, white butterflies flew out, hovering over the mound of flowers. She read the card. An old lady and her son she'd seen often at the Sans Souci—they'd been out front, they adored the Castles, now they adored her.

Weary fitters removed her dress carefully; by tomorrow they'd have it really ready, the seams firm. Yes, there'd be a tomorrow. Irene might be ill some days. Berlin came to tell her that. He also told her the headwaiter was here to take her back to the Sans Souci.

"Are you too tired? I can fix it, little Murray."

Tired? She rushed out to find Maurice, a taxi for the half-block ride.

"The place is packed," he told her. She could feel it, hurrying in.

"Everyone knows what you've done," Sabin said. "Half the audience from the theatre is here to applaud the little trouper." He bowed slightly, rubbing his hands. Unrecognizable. "You are ready? You will go on?"

She turned away slowly, changing her pace, removing her hat as if it were a crown.

"Well? Are you ready?"

"I'm hungry," she said slowly. "I must eat."

"You think of eating with the place packed? Otto Kahn is here with a party of twenty."

"Send the chef," she said quietly, going into her dressing room, into Jenny's hands. "Jenny, this must be changed, we must have taffeta and mirrors. You'll see tomorrow when you come to the theatre. . . . An omelet," she told the chef, "the kind they make for the actresses in Paris. Asparagus with hollandaise, coffee. Boil it fresh, please, and whipped cream."

The chef stared.

"A touch of sweet in the whipped cream."

The chef backed away.

When Jenny had stripped off her clothes, Mae stepped into

a cold shower, into the harsh spray, scrubbing hard with soap and a brush. Then she pounded herself with an oatmeal bag. She took her time. They could wait. They'd wait while she turned her face to the spray.

The sisters had punished her for dancing in the garden in her nightdress. She'd lighted matches and danced, pretending she was a firefly and they'd sent her to bed the next night without dinner and lectured her about fairy tales. But life was a fairy tale, she'd known it. Her grandmother had laughed at her when she wanted to be a dancer. Well, they'd laughed at Bernhardt too when she first appeared as a young girl at the *Comedie Française*; but the same Bernhardt became a great star and was still the greatest, young and glamorous, no matter what her age. You couldn't go plodding, you must go on your toes! She turned off the tap and toweled herself, put on her blue silk robe and stepped out to find the tiny room filled with the aroma of coffee and browned butter, her omelet under a silver hood on the dressing table.

Only after she was fed and fragrant, did she come out, circling the floor slowly to their applause. It had never been like this before, not one glass rattling, not one happy inebriate, not a fork raised, while she danced. When she had finished and danced an encore and returned in her white satin gown, they stood to give her an ovation.

Otto Kahn stepped forward. His white hair, white eyebrows and moustache shone. He greeted her with an old-world chivalry. The noted financier came often to the *Sans Souci*. She had seen his table on the edge of the dance floor, his guests in elegant evening dress; but tonight he was asking her to join them and there was a basket of gardenias at her place. He introduced his guests and she said hello and bent her hot little face to the flowers. Conversation flew.

Otto Kahn was a banker, one of the few who could hold his own with J. P. Morgan; but he was also a connoisseur of art, a lover of opera and a devotee of the theatre. He was keeping the Met alive almost single-handed, he was one of Broad-

way's busiest angels. One word from him and a playwright had a chance, a musician's star rose or a dancer's. He talked and everyone laughed at his wit; Mae could not think what to say. It was a relief when someone asked her to dance.

He was a powerful man, thick-shouldered, his face and neck bursting with color as if he ate nothing but rare roast beef. Jack deSaulles, social lion, former Yale quarterback. He put his arm across her shoulders and leaned against her, as he bent over to speak to Otto Kahn. His arm was heavy; she didn't know how to escape it. With the boys you met in show business, you just said, "Keep your hands to yourself, please." But this was a man.

Then abruptly someone lifted the heavy arm, a hand grasped her elbow and a deep voice said, "This happens to be my dance, Jackson."

She saw the pearl studs first, gleaming against his glossy shirt. Then she saw his square-jawed, dark, sullen face. He looked through and beyond DeSaulles. She couldn't move for the tension between the two men. Every woman in the place must envy her!

"Jay O'Brien," DeSaulles said bitterly.

"I've met Miss Murray and this dance is mine. Come, dear." As the music swung into a tango, he put his hand to her waist and deftly swept her onto the floor. He danced well, with authority, holding her clasped so close she could smell his clean flesh and lilac vegetal. This was all new but familiar, as if it had happened before. She lifted her eyes. No, she'd never seen him. The face was as chiselled as any statue's and as imperturbable. Only a muscle flexed in his jaw.

"We've met before," he murmured into her ear. "I was at the theatre, you were adorable."

It was the sort of performance Jack Barrymore might have given after having had a few too many. But the words, which would have left her cold in the theatre, made her tremble in his arms.

"I feel as if we had met," she said breathlessly.

"You're a witch, dear lady, you make me forget every other woman I've ever known. We'll drop by Reisenweber's when we leave here, we'll have a drink at the 400, breakfast at Ciro's."

"I go home with my maid. I have no playtime."

"Don't ever say no, dear lady. I have the devil's temper. And I owe you a bite of supper." The smile didn't become him. It slashed his face. "I bet ten thousand that I'd *have* this dance. Don't pull away, dear."

Had he really said ten *thousand dollars*? The shock of it made her pull away, wide-awake, aware of the other dancers, of Jack deSaulles with a dark sad-eyed girl but watching *her*. The minute the music stopped, Jack was beside them. He seized her wrist. Jay walked off with the dark-eyed girl, while DeSaulles implored that she let him take her home. He'd leave with the party, come back for her.

"Jay and I have a bet on. He's won one round, now give me a break. I want to be with you, don't you understand?"

"No," she said, trying to free herself. She hoped Jay O'Brien would glance back but it was the girl who turned, saw the clasped hands, and looked quickly away.

"She cares for you. She's hurt!"

"My wife doesn't own me."

"I must change. I have to dance again." She tore away and ran to her dressing room.

"Who those folks out there?" Jenny asked.

To Mae they were visitors from another planet, rounders, rich cafe society. Jack and Jay were both in Wall Street. Others in Otto Kahn's party were business tycoons, men who worked hard and played hard, and play centered about show business. Cabaret had become smart for this gay set, cabaret dancers were social lions and social lions were cabaret dancers. Lew Quinn, pet of the Four Hundred, had sent Joan Sawyer's salary sky high when he danced with her as her partner. Vernon and Irene had danced the Castle Walk down the aisle of a big society wedding in Chicago and started a whole

series of "tango" nuptials. Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt and her friends opened a cafeteria-lunch-dansant for "poor working girls" on top of the Strand Theater and served as waitresses so the city's stenographers might have a taste of cabaret at a modest price. Society had found something more lively than old-fashioned charity or evenings devoted to whist.

Play started with the cocktail hour; after cocktails, theatre. Then an hour or so in a restaurant cafe, dancing and dining, then a tour of the drinking spots where you saw everyone and were seen: Murray's, with its revolving dance floor, the Claridge, the New Yorker Roof, that was the itinerary; then Rector's, Churchill's or Reisenweber's, the 400 Club after the regular rooms closed, until 4 A.M.; breakfast at Ciro's or Jack's and to bed about six. To vary the "monotony" there were such downtown Bohemian spots as Joel's, Joe Brown's or Walter Sweeney's. Money of course was no object, good dance bands *were*, and hotels like the Astor had pulled apart their main dining rooms to lay large dance floors.

Playboys these rich young men, they played golf and the horses as well as Wall Street, drove Marmons, Maxwells, Cadillacs and Stutz Bearcats, Isottas, and Mercedes-Benz. They had been born with wealth, they were used to it; wealth loaned them an ease and an air of superiority.

Mae had never met this breed before. That dominating Jay O'Brien had taken the dance away from her, for a moment taken her self. It was a relief to have it back, to be tying on her dancing shoes, running out to do her rhumba.

How was one to deal with such men? It was fun to have them pursue you, to listen to their glib catch phrases and pretend they meant every word, but she didn't like being grabbed and fettered. She could sense their eyes now, following her. She whirled, stepped away, lost them, and just as well. For her there was something beyond anything they knew—this path of light with the gold dust dancing. Here in this path nothing existed except Mae Murray.

2



One or the other was there every night. Sometimes both. There were flowers, letters, flacons of perfume, narcissus *versus* gardenia, a tug of war. Jack sent her a gold purse with a bracelet chain, Jay sent a sterling silver compact with a diamond star. She tiptoed into Tiffany's to price them. Three hundred dollars. A hundred and fifty. The prices gave her a shiver of pleasure. She'd sold every trinket she'd ever had to run away from the convent. Now she was a star on Broadway.

It never occurred to her that Irene Castle would come back. It was *her* show and after the show, her Sans Souci. Afternoons, she'd meet Marilyn Miller and Olive Thomas, some of the crowd from *The Passing Show*, under the clock at the Biltmore. Sometimes Ann Pennington joined them, and Marion Davies. There were always dancing parties late in the afternoon; Jack deSaulles lumbered after her like a bear. He was persistent and insistent but he didn't frighten her. He was no dancer and he was married. The one who frightened her was Jay.

He had a high-flown way of talking that shocked her with its excessive ardor; it made her feel like a school girl and she looked like one, Jay said, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm. Good Lord, didn't she know she'd been born for *desire*? She knew nothing of the sort, but every moment with him was as unreal as being on a stage; she liked that. He was very demanding. At the theatre every night he sat in the lower box, stage right, watching her. At the *thés dansants*, at the Sans Souci, his dark brooding eyes welcomed her compulsively; but close to him, dancing with him, hearing his harsh whispered adoration, a hand seemed to push her back. She'd seen his picture on the sports page leaning low across his polo pony, mallet raised wickedly, teeth clenched. How could a man so repel and attract you?

He insisted he was in love with her and was going to marry her. She tried to explain that if she were to be a big star, she couldn't be thinking of marriage, she must be dedicated. That's why she spent so much time at the theatre, at museums, at rehearsal halls practicing—she had so much to learn.

"I want to be in the Ziegfeld *Follies*, Jay."

"You live in a dream world," he said flatly. "I don't mind your being on the stage, baby. I'd never have noticed you if you weren't. I might even be able to help."

But Bernhardt had made her great mistake in marrying Damala. It was essential to be free.

"There's no such thing as freedom." He slammed his fist on the table, bouncing her fragile cup. He didn't even pay the bill. He just left her, sitting alone at the little table at Rector's, fumbling at spilled tea with her napkin. She asked the waiter for hot water, she tried to nibble at one of the small cakes stuffed with raisins; but tears swelled her throat, she had to hold her head high to keep them back. What was wrong with the man?

That night he was not at the theatre. She knew it the moment she stepped onto the stage; the magnet was missing, the first time in three weeks. When they'd taken their final bows,

Mr. Dillingham walked along with her to her dressing room. The florist had just left a large box at her door.

"Irene comes back tomorrow," Dillingham said. "We'll never forget what you've done for us, Mae. Open your flowers." He took a gold knife from his watch chain, and slit the string with the blade. There were dozens of American beauties from him and Irving and Vernon, and tucked in with the flowers was Dillingham's check for five thousand dollars.

"You're disappointed?" he said, studying her face, and laughed when she turned pink and said no, she was pleased, delighted. Three weeks, five thousand dollars, from one of the top musical producers—it proved she was somebody. Wait until Jay heard this. Dream world indeed! But he wasn't at the stage door or at the Sans Souci that night. Or the next. He dropped out of her world as abruptly as he'd dropped in.

She went to a party at the DeSaulles' a few weeks later just in the hope of seeing him. Jack had invited her to a dozen parties and she'd refused; but Jay would certainly be at this one—forty guests, the Broadway crowd. Olive and Marilyn had promised to wait and go with her after her first show. The three of them piled into a cab made a picture, all blue-eyed, all fair, two golden and Olive's chestnut hair in long curls caught up with jeweled pins. Their fragile chiffon dresses billowed with every puff of air. Mae's gold hoops swung from her ears; she looked like a gypsy, Marilyn said. Soft spring air enveloped them as they stepped from curb to lobby.

The girls nudged each other as they walked into wide lavish rooms filled with chatter, laughter, music—all the noise stirred into a mighty beat by the drummer who wielded his sticks exuberantly. It was a two-story living room and dining room, hung with brilliant chandeliers. The orchestra played on the balcony and over the balcony rail hung a thick crimson Oriental rug. Large Buddhas in wood and ivory sat on polished bases surveying the scene with ambiguous eyes. No sign of Jay anywhere. Everyone was very gay; in the whirling room they seemed a bit unsteady. One glittering girl swayed past

them at a perilous angle. But the butler was steady enough. He stood stiff as a ramrod, taking their wraps, her red satin coat.

"Now the party can start!" shouted Jack, hurrying to greet them, bowing over their hands. Everyone turned, smiled, waved hello. They were in the limelight, vivacious, enjoying the stir they made.

Jack tried to fold her in his arms, he wanted to dance.

"You'll spill that champagne," she laughed, holding him off, straightening the glass he held awkwardly. "Besides, we're starved." *He* wasn't there. She'd searched all the faces.

Very well, if she wanted to eat, they'd eat, Jack said, lurching a little as he pulled her arm through his.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the butler, sounding a soft silver bong, "dinner is . . ."

The drummer stirred them into action, and Jack roared, "Come and get it."

People swayed toward the dining room, where a long table was draped in lace, banked with red roses, glittering with crystal, silver and gold-embossed china. Jack led her to the head of the table and pulled out her chair. Champagne slopped from his glass and two waiters fell at his feet with white cloths.

"I shouldn't sit at the head of the table. Your wife. . ."

"Is out on Long Island where she belongs," he said. "'P-l-a-y a simple m-e-l-o-d-y,'" he roared, waving his glass to the orchestra which promptly swung into tune. "'Play me some rag, just change that classical nag to some sweet beautiful drag.'"

People sang with him. The girls screamed with delight as they tore open the gifts at each plate. Hers was a golden compact with *MAE* spelled out in rubies.

"I want you in my arms," Jack muttered drunkenly.

"Jack, sit down, they're serving." Waiters had uncovered silver trays, the table was enveloped in the scent of pheasant and wild rice. Sparkling burgundy was poured. She tried a sip. The bubbles danced, pricked her tongue.

"Have something to eat, Jack; it's good for you."

He watched her cut the food, lift a forkful, and lean across him to talk to Olive, ignoring him.

"Why do you think I gave this damned party?" he hollered, and lunging forward, smothered her in alcohol fumes, his mouth all over her face.

The kisses stopped abruptly. The noise and laughter stopped. The orchestra sounded loud and lonely. She pushed Jack away and there stood Jay O'Brien.

"So, you've won your bet," Jay said, smiling bitterly. "You got her to your apartment. Very well, Jackson, I've come to pay you." He reached for his billfold and took out two bills, still smiling, he smashed the billfold and his fist in Jack's face. The big man crashed back against the table; as he got to his feet, Jay grasped the lace table cloth and yanked it with his full might, smashing food, flowers, everything to the floor.

The guests sat, paralyzed. Jay took a step toward her, lifted her by the elbows and held her against him level with his eyes. He was trembling violently, she trembled with him. He wanted to know why she'd come.

"I go where I wish. I'm no kidnapped baby."

He grabbed at her throat and she could feel her pulse moving against the muscles of his hand. Blood swelled her lips.

"You're answering every question I've ever had about you," she gasped. She kept her chin high, daring him; and he let go. People started talking and laughing nervously. It had been a joke, of course. Jay disappeared in a mass of waiters' white coats.

"Gypsy, you were great," Marilyn said.

Before she could answer, Jack had picked her up and was running with her on his shoulder, down the stairs. He dumped her in his car, jumped in beside her, the doorman gave the crank a whirl, and they went racing through Central Park. He held her tight against him, laughing as she struggled. It was cool; even with him holding her she felt chilled. Her light chiffon dress, was soaked with wine, ruined. They raced along Riverside Drive.

"Now you're a kidnapped baby," he said, holding her against him.

"I thought you and Jay were such friends," Mae said.

"No men are friends where women are concerned."

"I'm not interested in men, Jack. I'm interested in dancing."

He laughed. "You'll be living on Park Avenue before the year is out. Jay and I have a bet."

She hit him as hard as she could.

"That's part of your charm," he laughed, "that incredible faith in virginity."

It was no use answering. She peered out into the night, trying to recognize what was spelled in the electric bulbs. Yonkers.

"Jack, let me telephone the club, please. This is my job. You promised me—if I came to the party, you'd get me back for my last show."

He finally did stop before an all-night drug store. It was terribly late and the phone rang and rang before Maurice answered at the Sans Souci.

"There was someone waiting to see you," he said. "Mr. Ziegfeld was here. Mr. Florenz Ziegfeld."

She marched out to the car without a word and silently they drove home. She never wanted to see him or Jay again as long as she lived. She wanted her own life back. At three A.M., they pulled up in front of her house. A tall figure stepped from the doorway. Jay's face was white in the glare of headlights. She stared at him numbly while Jack gunned the car to full speed and swept on.

"I'll take you to a hotel," he said. "I'll arrange everything."

When he pulled up at a place in the West Fifties, she jumped out and ran to a policeman who stood leaning, half-asleep, against a lamp post.

"I must have a taxi, at once, please." Obliquely, she saw Jack retreating from the law. The policeman blew his whistle, bored. She might have been the twenty-fifth girl who'd run to him out of the night without a wrap in a wine-stained evening

dress. She sat wooden as a doll in the taxi, wanting to get home to Jenny and the five cats and a cup of hot coffee; and the coffee was ready, she smelled it the minute the door opened.

"Whatever in the world," Jenny said, hugging her, while the cats nudged her feet.

She didn't answer. Over Jenny's shoulder she could see someone seated on the couch, like a dainty ivory figurine draped in black.

"You have been with my husband!" said the girl. She turned her sad eyes and it was the girl from Otto Kahn's party, Blanca deSaulles. "You must stop trying to take away my husband." She touched her throat with one black-gloved finger as if she were choking.

"I don't want your husband; I don't even like him. Look at my dress. It cost a week's salary—and look."

"Lord have mercy," murmured Jenny.

"Do you think I like being pulled and pushed about? Florenz Ziegfeld was waiting for me tonight at the Sans Souci. Because of your husband, I missed seeing Florenz Ziegfeld!" Her mouth wobbled in spite of her, the tears wouldn't be held.

"If I've misunderstood you, I'm sorry."

"You ladies just please step in here and have a cup of coffee," Jenny said. "The waffles are coming up."

There was a moment of hesitation, then, a trifle uncertainly, they stepped over the cats and sat down at the small table. Jenny poured coffee, brought out the waffles and smoking sausage. As they ate, they watched each other guardedly. Blanca was a real lady, the kind from the society pages. Pearls shone in her ears, her black dress was severely simple, her hair was parted in the middle, smoothed back into a chignon with a single pearl pin. Mae noted it all. She noted too that the liquid eyes spoke of love and sorrow. *Blue*, the big Persian, had crawled up into her lap and Mae stroked it absently. Why should anyone so lovely and so rich be unhappy?

"Jack is what you would call a chaser," Blanca said. "I know.

He chased me from New York to Paris to Madrid, to Santiago, finally to La Sereña Coquimbo. This is in Chile, where I come from. My father is a diplomat. My first trip with him was when I was sixteen. We came to New York and I met Jack." She touched her throat again with her finger. "There are men like this, it is an illness virtually. Once they achieve the goal, once their love is returned—even if the girl *hesitates* as she runs—it is over." She put down her fork. "I am free to go back to Chile, but it would mean leaving my little boy. I could not leave him."

"Don't let them bamboozle you, and don't let them see you're hurt. Go dancing. You couldn't be unhappy when you're dancing. He'll like you better when you're happy."

Blanca looked at her, incredulous. "You talk like a child." She stood up and impulsively pressed her cheek to Mae's. "Goodnight, *niña*," she said and vanished.

"You get into bed," Jenny ordered. "I'm staying right here this morning to see you sleep. And you forget these high society men. Doesn't take mother-wit to size them up. Lord ha' mercy! Look at that dress."

When she wakened the place was filled with flowers, every vase was crammed with flowers, so were the pots and pans and a milk bottle. All from Jay O'Brien.

"My precious baby," he wrote, extravagantly, "Forgive me. As Allah is my witness, I am in love, I'm tortured, I'm waiting for your call."

The bell rang, and a pink suit and blue velvet hat whirled into the room. "Gypsy! Mr. Ziegfeld wants to see you," Marilyn Miller said. "Today." They fell in each others' arms. It must mean the *Follies*.

"You seem to be celebrating already," laughed Marilyn. "Look at those flowers."

"From Jay O'Brien."

"Get rid of him," Marilyn said. "The way he behaved last night! Come on, Gypsy, get dressed. We're going to see a girl's best friend."

Florenz Ziegfeld had arrived on Broadway at a time when comic opera was neither comic nor opera, when music-hall ladies were exposing themselves in long black stockings, tights to the knee and voluminous skirts. A standing joke of the period concerned the stage-door Johnny escorting a chorus girl while a child chased after them yelling, "Where are you going, Grandma?" It was Ziegfeld who raised the revue from cheap vaudeville business to an affluent art. With one triumph behind him (he'd introduced strong man Sandow at the Chicago World's Fair), but no money (he'd lost the profits at Monte Carlo), Ziegfeld had visited London's Palace Music Hall and been entranced by the alluring chanteuse who sang "Won't You Come and Play Wiz Me?" Every producer in America had tried to lure Mlle. Anna Held across the Atlantic, at any price. Young Ziegfeld went backstage without a dime and secured a contract and Anna's heart. Under his aegis she became the brightest of stars, and with her he became the brilliant impresario.

It was Anna who inspired her husband to undertake the *Follies*. The original beauties were known as "Anna Held Girls" and they startled America when the revue opened at the open-air Jardin de Paris on the roof of the New York Theater. Here was mirth, music and the prettiest girls Broadway had ever seen, presented in luxurious costumes and elegant décor. Ziegfeld had a talent for beauty; he also had taste. He would pick one girl for her loveliness of feature, another for grace, another for the magnificent red hair which would flame on a stage when surrounded by a sea of silver blondes. Everything was done to make each girl feel beautiful. Costumes were made of the most costly materials, satins, laces and furs were the most exquisite; when a Ziegfeld beauty stood, framed against satin draperies and lit with a pale pink spot, she appeared not only glorified but spiritually radiant. He also saw to it that her pocketbook reflected some of the radiance. Chorus girls until now had been paid thirty dollars a week; in Ziegfeld productions they started at fifty and showgirls earned one

hundred seventy-five. And many a day, Ziegfeld stopped at Tiffany's en route to the theatre and picked up a bracelet or two, a brooch or bauble for his girls.

Better than the bangles was his gift of showmanship. He'd made a star of Lillian Lorraine; he'd made a star of Fanny Brice. The song "Mon Homme" was something he'd picked up in Paris, intending it for prima donna Vera Mitchellini; at the last minute, Ziegfeld gave the song to Fanny. Over her violent protests, he dressed her in cotton stockings and old shoes, tore her skirt, smeared her face, and heartbroken Fanny (she had wanted to wear red velvet) gave "My Man" the heartbreak that made her famous.

The years had passed, Ziegfeld and Anna had been divorced; he was married now to beautiful Billie Burke and the *Follies*, housed in its own New Amsterdam Theatre, had become a national institution. On the New Amsterdam Roof was the new Midnight Frolics, swankest of cabarets. It was to Ziegfeld's office on the Roof that Marilyn brought Mae Murray.

Everything had grandeur here: the polished wood, the deep carpet, the tiny ivory and bronze elephants parading across the width of the desk; most impressive of all was the man. Prematurely silver hair gave him dignity, the soft sing-song voice demanded close attention, there was a sense of power. His face was impassive, yet the light eyes were full of life, the long nose slightly quizzical; he had a sure way of taking your hand, observing you from under the broad-arched brow.

"You've certainly been making a lot of noise on Broadway, young lady, and I expect you to make a lot more. We have something very special for you in the *Follies*, an East Indian number. You will be a Persian princess carried on stage wrapped in a rug. You'll dance beside a pool with a background of circular gold walls, a cobalt-blue sky."

She felt like a princess, seated in a deep soft chair, while he introduced Gene Buck, the man he relied on for advice and companionship. It was up to Buck to find top comedians and persuade Ziegfeld to give them a try. Where other shows could

boast one headliner or two, the *Follies* accumulated show-stoppers in a veritable bouquet. Ziegfeld chewed on his unlit cigar and outlined for Mae Murray his season's plans. "A nice little show for the summer," he said. In it she would be introduced in a cast including Olive Thomas, Kay Laurel, Justine Johnstone, Ann Pennington, Lucille Cavanaugh, George White and Bernard Granville *and* Ina Claire *and* Ed Wynn *and* W. C. Fields *and* Bert Williams!

It was beyond belief. She'd dreamed of the *Follies* since she was a hungry child, hanging around stage doors, pleading for a chance to dance. Now she gazed into the very face of the star-maker.

Later she phoned Jay; she had to call and share her good fortune. He sat with her in the garden at the Ritz while she poured out the wonders, what Gene Buck had said and Mr. Ziegfeld.

"He makes you feel like a queen, Jay."

"You are a queen, baby." He nodded. This was the kind of language he understood. "The question is, when are you going to be mine?"

"I don't know, how can I say?"

"But you love me, baby."

"I'm going to be in the Ziegfeld *Follies*, Jay!"

He sat brooding.

"Don't try to force life, Jay. You can't force it and you can't force me."

This time it was she who left first, clicking over the marble on her firm little heels.

3



The stage of the New Amsterdam Theater at rehearsal time was like a ten-ring circus. The piano played incessantly, you stopped hearing the tune and heard only the thud. Lines of girls in leotards arched glided kicked stepped, arched glided kicked. Olive Thomas—and no one was as beautiful as this. Renowned artist Harrison Fisher called her “the most beautiful girl in the world”—walked in a slow parade from backdrop to footlights in blue chiffon and sable, carrying an enormous sable muff, on her head a hat of blue feathers matching the blue of her eyes. They were calm, wide eyes, fringed with thick brown lashes, and when she smiled her face had a shy light. She smiled now at blonde Justine Johnstone, who paraded in scarf and hat of white ermine, the hat tall as a drum major’s, the scarf falling from a regal collar front and back leaving her smooth limbs bare and free. Veronica, the costumer, walked between them, eyeing these beauties critically as a ringmaster. In pink ruffled bloomers, dimpled Ann Pennington slid her leg along the bar and laughed wickedly at a word from Julian Mitchell who was working down front on a scene with George White. Kay Laurel

and Lucille Cavanaugh kicked and twirled, stage left. Workmen were pounding somewhere down below. The piano thudded.

In the midst of it, Mae made a quick turn, bent back until the whole noisy stage was upside down, swung up, arms outstretched, light as air. She laughed to herself, dusted off her pink leotard where one knee had brushed the floor and went on, hearing music inside her, her own rhythm.

"Remember what you did? Try it again," called a nasal voice, from far off in the gallery. . . . You never knew where he was or what he saw, this Ziegfeld. He was everywhere, no detail escaped him.

"Show me something, Mae. Go ahead, it looked good."

She giggled, going into a quick turn, repeating the cadence, adding to it. By the time she'd finished, he was standing beside her on the apron with Goldie, his secretary.

"Having fun? Good," he said. "Improvise a little more. You're a graceful girl, Mae. Your feet never touch the ground. This can work into your East Indian specialty. Slow down the tempo," he called to the pianist. "All right, now."

It wasn't hard to improvise. She *was* the Persian princess dancing beside the pool, wooing the prince, yielding and withdrawing.

"Good," Ziegfeld said. "We'll use that. Now something else. Something excellent for you. We're going to do a travesty on motion pictures and you'll play the heroine, Merry Pickum."

"I don't like motion pictures," she said quietly.

"You've seen Mary Pickford?"

"No."

"This is going to be an amusing take-off. Picture this: you'll come running down the center aisle, the spot picks you up, another spot catches Ed Wynn in the audience. He rails against the interruption like a disgruntled customer while you breathlessly announce that your picture's about to be shown." He droned it all in his thin whine—how she'd run along the orchestra rail, up onto the stage and into the proscenium

arch, how the curtain would lift and there she'd be on screen, dressed like a little girl of the Civil War period, bouffant dress of course, and golden curls. "You'll carry on a conversation slow motion with Ed Wynn as if the picture was speaking from the screen."

"But Mr. Ziegfeld..."

"Who's the boss?" he said. "Gene Buck and Julian Mitchell will go over with you Monday, the film studio's in Jersey. Send Gene and Julian telegrams, Goldie. You'll look beautiful on film, my dear. By the way, have you seen the sketches for your East Indian number?"

Looking into his face was like seeing yourself in a mirror—the wide-spread eyebrows, the high square brow, the cool thoughtful eyes. In his face she could see a dazzling little figure running upstairs, flinging herself over the golden wall.

"Make arrangements for Mae to see the sketches," he told Goldie and Goldie made a note. She also handed Mae an appointment card for a fitting Friday, at Veronica's, a white chiffon dress girdled in gold for the princess. She laughed.

"Always laughing," he said in his nosy way. "Good, keep happy." He walked on.

She stood hypnotized; she was wearing the white chiffon, running up the stairs on opening night. *Mama Mia!*

"Are we going to the Knickerbocker?" Olive said, gliding slowly by, the feathers of her hat trembling. "Or to the Astor?"

"I'm meeting Jay at the Knickerbocker," she whispered.

"Talk out loud, child, rehearsal's over."

And abruptly, the music stopped. In the emptiness, the line of dancers fell apart.

"How can you think of tea-dancing," groaned one pretty chorus girl. "I'm dead. That Wayburn's a slave-driver."

"If you were a big headliner like Lillian Lorraine, you'd skip rehearsals and rest," said another.

"Hmm. You notice she's not *in* the *Follies* this year."

"Who, Ziegfeld's folly? Oh, he caught her hiding her liquor in the top of the water closet," laughed another.

"Hush. Poor Lillian is making it the hard way. She's in that awful movie serial *Neal of the Navy*."

"A dancer should never tire," Mae told the girl dragging her feet. "Eat things that grow out of the ground, breathe living air. You know I walk through Central Park every morning before I come to the theatre?"

"I can't bear it," sighed Lucille Cavanaugh.

"What in the world is there to do in Central Park in daylight?" asked Kay Laurel in such an aghast tone all the others laughed, crowding up the circular iron steps.

"Feed the squirrels, watch the birds, breathe. Do you know summer's here? The park's alive."

"Don't tell me Jay goes with you on these nature-study hikes," Olive said.

No, Jay didn't go with her. He did something about Wall Street, he did something about polo and motor cars. She really didn't know what Jay did before 5:30.

"Get a move on, girls."

"Jack Barrymore's going to be at the Knickerbocker."

"Did you know Florence Reed had the curtain rung down on him last night? Late again, and when he came weaving on, instead of his lines he kept saying, 'It's all right, little woman, it's all right.' But it wasn't all right and he's out of *The Yellow Ticket*."

"I'll console him, girls."

"Gaby Deslys and Joe Santley are going to the Knickerbocker, too," Lucille said. "I caught the show last night."

"Don't you love that song, 'Stop! Look! Listen!'"

"Suppose Vernon Castle will be there? Let's go to Castle House," said Olive, who was crazy about Vernon.

"Everyone's going to the Knickerbocker," Kay said.

And everyone did. It was the same every day. No matter where they went, *everyone* was there; but the Knickerbocker was their favorite spot. "The 42nd Street Country Club," the hotel was called. Fifteen stories of terra cotta and limestone, it rose glittering over Broadway, a French Renaissance structure

with plenty of flash. Caruso lived there, and many other celebrities; the menus offered shirred eggs and liver as "Cohan and Harris Special Eggs." The grill was excellent and in the bar, Maxfield Parrish's painting, "Old King Cole," grinned down on the gayest aggregations in town.

Newspapers kept harping on the war in Europe, *Variety* sang the blues about show business, but you couldn't believe it. Not here in this place vibrant with people, the golden cocktails, the rhythm of moving feet, the smile of Old King Cole. Jay O'Brien stood with a group of men near the bar. He saw her at once, waved, and continued his conversation.

"Yes, thank you." She smiled at the hovering waiter and selected a *petit four* from the pastry tray. "May I have two?"

She and Olive giggled like children over the sweets. Her mouth was filled with pastry, when she first noticed him, a dark almond-eyed young man with a pliant grace all his own. She asked Olive who he was.

"He dances at Maxim's, I think," Olive said. "Damned beautiful, isn't he?"

He was like a sensuous animal stalking the jazz jungle. She studied him carefully; everything about him was a trifle different, his coat long, tightly fitted, lean over the hips. It suited him; so did the long twisted loop of chain that swung against his leg and the patent-leather hair. As if he sensed her eyes on him he looked up at that instant, then deferentially inclined his head. She liked his graceful manners, the evident breeding, the little bow. He was Latin, of course. And those knowing eyes! She'd confessed once as a child to a young priest with just such dark soft suede eyes.

"Girl, how I've dreamed of you." Jay's voice startled her. With all the people milling about, in the haze of cigarette smoke, he stood gazing down at her, saying embarrassingly intimate things. Olive moved tactfully away. Mae gave him a look of blank innocence. Half the time she wasn't sure what Jay was talking about.

"I called you three times today. You must have left at dawn.

That witch of yours tried to tell me you were picking posies in Central Park."

She laughed. "I walk to rehearsal, Jay. It gets me ready. Even dragonflies know how to dance."

"I was calling to ask when you plan to marry me. What day."

She tried to laugh it away.

"Don't ever laugh at me!" He gave her a frightening look. "Don't *ever* laugh at me."

Luckily, they were interrupted. She stood, shaken, while the dark young dancer bowed over her hand.

"Rodolpho di Valentina," he said. "Do you care to tango?"

She slipped into his arms quickly, avoiding the eyes that knew too much. She was bewildered by Jay's fury. At first she couldn't hear the music. But how this young man danced! The real tango, heels kneading the floor, the street dance as she'd seen it in Paris. He said nothing. He gave himself to the dance as if his sole joy was to dance, and with *her*.

Rodolpho Alfonso Raffaello Pierre Filiberti Guglielmi di Valentina d'Antonguolla had been in America a year and a half. Unlike the young American girls who wished to forget their origins, this Italian boy was fastidious in remembering his. He'd arrived on the liner *Cleveland*, with 800 British pounds and a letter to the Commissioner of Immigration explaining that he'd been graduated from the Royal Academy of Agriculture and what his value might be as a landscape gardener. But he didn't deliver that letter, not right away. First, he engaged a room with an Italian family, the Giolottis; then he walked about the city and made his first attempts at communicating in English—so homesick, so lonely that two days later, on Christmas, he cried himself to sleep at Bustanoby's restaurant where the waiters at least spoke French (Rudy spoke French, as well as Italian and Spanish). His first friends, actually, were Count Alex Salm, Count Otto Salm and George

Ragni. They spoke French, they were *bons vivants*, every night the young Italian went dancing with them. He watched Count Alex execute the *cortez*; in short order he had made the dance his own. Almost as quickly, he was penniless. Then he took the letter to the Commissioner of Immigration.

His first job had been to help lay out Italian gardens for Mr. Cornelius Bliss' country residence on Long Island; but he got into mischief with the boss' motorcycle. He sprayed roses in Central Park. When he went to take the examination to become an apprentice landscape gardener with the New York Park Commission, he found one needed first to be an American citizen. There had been a hungry, bitter interlude before, through other Italian boys, he got the job at Maxim's; he was a natural dancer and he had a quiet deference women liked. When you saw him closely, as Mae was seeing him, he looked very boyish. He was warm from the dancing, his olive skin glistened, his eyes were luminous and sad. The one flaw in his face was a thin white scar on his right cheek. He saw her note it.

"When I was five years old," he told her. "I was trying to shave like a man."

"Oh."

"They call me Rudy," he went on, holding her tightly, and suddenly she felt his warm breath on her neck. His lips touched her skin.

"Don't Rudy. You're spoiling it."

"I am excited." He shrugged his shoulders. "You draw me to you."

"Dancing is quite enough," she said. And as he relaxed his hold, looking hurt, she quickly added, "Be my *dancing* friend, Rudy."

Then he laughed. "Very well, this is new to me, my dancing friend. I will pick you up after rehearsal tonight, yes? We will dance properly."

"Some other night, Rudy. I have a previous engagement."

But did she have? Jay had stalked off, angry again. He did not come by that night. His note arrived by messenger, waking her the next morning.

Beloved girl...your marvelous mouth haunts me. And all that I hear from it is Victorian twaddle. I want to kiss you until you tremble. I want to draw my fingertips across the inner ivory surface of your thighs. In the name of the seven hundred bald-headed virgins, stop this weird game and marry me.

How dare he write such nonsense. But it made her shiver. She prepared to be utterly aloof to Jay; but when he came backstage to rehearsal the next day, he was very proper, stopping to chat with Ziegfeld, paying his respects to Jenny, and treating her so courteously that she began to doubt his letter. Wait until he saw her in the *Follies*, he would know then what she was striving for, who she *was*.

The one who knew without explanation was Rudy di Valentina. He picked her up many nights after rehearsals. Almost whenever Jay did not come, Rudy was waiting at the stage door to tuck her arm through his and lead her out into the warm night carnival of flashing signs and flashing people, out-of-towners in light summer clothes, mingling with New Yorkers in the exciting kaleidoscope of Broadway. He'd find a restaurant with a Latin band; they'd dance, they'd drink wine and eat omelets. Rudy didn't touch hard liquor, but he loved wine and he'd order the wines he'd drunk as a boy. At two o'clock or three, roaming the dark canyons of the city, they'd see the blank eyes of a million windows lighted by a shaft of moonlight.

"I like this city," he'd say. "She has been sweet to me even when she punished me like a cross stepmother."

Central Park slept. The sky which had seemed so close when Mae had fed the squirrels that morning, now was darkly lost. They could hear only the plumed trees sighing in the wind. They walked hand in hand along deserted paths.

"I hate to let you go, Murray. You're good for me." He would have walked all night.

Sometimes on Sunday they'd go to Long Beach, away from the overheated city. She wore a big straw hat to protect her face from sunburn, and watched Rudy while he swam. His arms were strong and brown stroking the water. When he found a big dog on the beach he would race it, wrestle with it for a stick, fight hard as if he meant it, pummel the dog lovingly, and let it go. Then he'd lie in the sand beside her, toying with the red satin laces of her bathing shoes. The heat made him ardent and dreamy. You knew always how it was with Rudy. He was as open as a child; and as a child mysteriously spiritual. Without the panther's spring, he might have been a priest of some occult faith. There was a mystical quality in him; he listened for a voice. Little things pleased him: a hot dog and milk out under the sun, a sand castle, sand-pipers stepping gingerly about stabbing at the sand with their sharp beaks.

He was delighted that she had Italian origins. Irish and a little bit of North Italy, she said; that item in the paper about her people being Austrian and Belgian was nonsense. Everyone knew that Northern Italians were blonde and fair. Rudy came from the warm dark South, from Castellaneta. He told her of the farmhouse where he'd been born, low built with thick whitewashed stone walls and heavy blinds that were barred at night. It was a house full of sunlight, with crucifixes and madonnas in every room. He told her of afternoons in the shaded patio, his mother sewing and speaking of her home in Paris, where her father had been a distinguished doctor. Sometimes Rudy and his brother Alberto duelled with swords while the sisters, Beatrice and Maria, listened, watched. Once, to impress Maria he had smoked corn silk; she wasn't impressed, so he'd smoked a cigarette; she still wasn't impressed, so he had then filched his father's pipe and smoked that, and was caught in the act. His father had been a captain in the

cavalry, then a small farmer and veterinarian for the district. Rodolpho was eleven when his father died. He described the military funeral, the coach drawn by six fine horses, the coachman in black and silver. He told how awed the children had been, riding in the carriage with their mother who was overwhelmed by grief.

How he missed his family! He had one dream: someday to go back to Italy, a success, to make his mother proud. He asked Mae about her family and she told him what she had come to believe—her father had died early, her mother had gone to Europe and left her in the care of a grandmother who put her in convents, and she'd run away.

If he missed his family so, why had he come to America? He laughed when she asked that. He'd been graduated with honors from the Royal Academy of Agriculture (the first time he'd gotten on well in any school) and he'd gone off to Paris for a holiday with two friends. He'd sold his old Fiat for money to go. But he'd squandered that money in Paris, and when the family sent more, he'd dropped by at Monte Carlo and lost that. Who knew why? He'd been high-spirited and daring from the first, loved the theatre, loved the military. When a traveling show stopped at Castellaneta, he'd made friends with an actor, agreed to join the company, and dated a pretty actress. He'd have gone on tour with them then and there but his mother had cried bitterly that night, and before breakfast the village priest had arrived; so, he had not joined the troupe.

His uncle had taken matters in hand after the episode at Monte Carlo. "I was sent to America as punishment, and punishment it was for a while, let me tell you, Murray. I lived like a beggar, I slept a whole night on a bench in Central Park. And now, here I am. I find it a lovely punishment," he said, looking at her with his impassioned face.

She changed subjects quickly. She must be wary with Rudy. He could become importunate.

"Yes, I know. I am the *dancing* friend," he said.

He never mentioned Jay O'Brien, but he seemed to know. When they did meet occasionally at a gathering, he assumed a formal correct demeanor like a cadet at attention. He let Jay claim and monopolize her. As for Mr. O'Brien, Mae believed him unaware of Rudy's existence. She was wrong, she discovered when Jay took her dancing one night.

"Gypsy, where have you been? I haven't seen you in weeks!" Marilyn said, when they met amid the satin and silver trappings, the bald heads and bare shoulders of the New Amsterdam Roof.

"Lady Mae has found herself a gigolo," Jay said quickly, offering her a cocktail, then drinking it himself as he always did.

"Rudy is not a gigolo. He's a dancer."

"Oh, doll, for God's sake what do you think he does at Maxim's?"

"He is paid by Maxim's for dancing."

"With the lady customers. And all the rich old hags take private lessons. He's simply *divine*, I understand," Jay said, mimicking Rudy's feminine fans.

"You might be interested to know he's replacing Clifton Webb as Bonnie Glass' dancing partner. They're booked for a gala benefit at Delmonico's. What about that?"

"I love you when you wave the flag. George, bring Miss Murray coffee and some red, white and blue pastries."

She bit her tongue trying to think of a sophisticated retort. He marched her to the floor into a waltz.

"Salvation Nell," he mocked. "The scent of your hair drives me mad. It completely belies your tambourine. What is it you want? That I writhe? By the tin horns of Saint Gabriel, I'll writhe!"

Anger ebbed from her at his purple speeches. They were so outlandish, that they made her laugh, even when she was about to cry. Wait until opening night, just a week away, water, running up the steps into the cobalt sky—wait.

"You're in love with me, Mae," he insisted. "This is love."

And perhaps it was. Awareness of him wove into every hour of every day, and as the days rolled toward opening night her anticipation grew until it felt like love, might be love. Excitement all around her rose, caught up with her own, mounted to a tumult.

There was nothing in New York like a Ziegfeld opening. Tickets were selling for a hundred dollars apiece, for weeks people had fought their way to the box office, and into the scalpers' little holes on Broadway. Ziegfeld had introduced a ticket auction from the stage of the New Amsterdam; and Diamond Jim Brady, dealer in railroad supplies, Broadway habitué, first nighter, prodigious eater, lavish spender, had stood up in his flamboyant suit and great chamois-colored vest, bulky yellow diamonds gleaming in his cuffs, and bid seven hundred and fifty dollars for ten tickets! This was the gala event of the year; the audience came as to a shrine.

"Flowers from Mr. Ziegfeld," Jenny said, showing her the box of sweetheart roses. It was a tradition. Mr. Ziegfeld sent every girl in the show a floral tribute. "A telegram from the old lady and her son," Jenny said. "A telegram from Mr. Berlin." Another armload of flowers, from Otto Kahn.

The door opened and closed, opened and closed. From the din backstage it might seem that after all the weeks of rehearsal, the show was finally being put together *now*.

"Forty-second Street's so jammed with traffic they'll have to hold the curtain," Penny said, poking her head in.

"Get those goddamned ropes off the stage," shouted stage manager Zeke Colvan.

Wardrobe women were rushing back and forth with bales of satin. Western Union messengers ducked in and out. Electricians adjusted lights. "Scene two, open with three, add another pink in the rear, dim down to two," screamed a shrill voice.

"Don't forget for the finale, the boss wants them girls flooded in a bright white light."

"I've lost a shoe," cried a nervous apparition, rushing past in veils of pink chiffon and little else.

"Move those flowers, you'll have to move those damned flowers!" The stage manager again, trying to push a way through.

A small nervous man with acrobatic eyebrows and a tall loose-limbed Negro stood together cracking jokes, trying to swallow stage fright. The little buffoon who would go out in a few minutes and panic the audience with his crazy inventions, his nervous monologue punctuated with giggles, lisps and chuckles was Ed Wynn, former vaudeville headliner, now a musical-comedy hit. The tall dark man was "the one and only" Bert Williams, song and dance comedian, expert pantomimist, the man famous for his song "Nobody" and his catch line, "It's a bear." These two comedians had both appeared in the *Follies* the year before; in fact, this was Bert Williams' fifth show for Ziegfeld. (He was the first Negro entertainer to appear in an all-white show across the country.) Yet they both had opening-night jitters in the midst of all the confusion backstage, the sounds of activity out front. Musicians were entering the pit, tuning up.

Jenny opened the door again and Mae caught a glimpse of "Mr. Icewater" himself. In the midst of chaos, Ziegfeld was the calm, the unperturbed one. He leaned against a stepladder as if he were alone, chewing an unlit cigar. Pink light passed slowly over him, illuminating his brown shoes, gray suit, soft lavender shirt, the collar nicked neatly with a gold pin, gray tie, soft gray felt hat. The hawklike nose scented the atmosphere; hearing the music, his face took on its quick, engaging smile. He touched his hat and left, to catch the show from out front. Ed Wynn had told her that he'd lean unperturbed against the onyx stairway leading to the balcony, and decide which bit of scenery should be discarded and rebuilt, regardless of expense, which prop or costume or skit should be changed. Sometimes Goldie would stand with him, sometimes

Stanley Sharpe, the business manager who always tried to talk Ziegfeld out of further extravagance.

"Last call! Curtain! Opening chorus!"

"Watch that light, Bill."

"Ever get a show out of this mess, I'll be surprised," Jenny said.

But they'd get a show. The tempo was right, the place crammed with talent. All of us in one pot boiling to a good stew, Mae thought.

The orchestra burst into its overture; she hugged Jenny and went out into the wings in her dress of silk chiffon. She could feel the gossamer lining against her flesh.

"Who *knows* whether the dress is lined or not?" Veronica had demanded. And Mr. Ziegfeld said:

"My girls know. Miss Murray will know. They can feel the elegance, it makes them more elegant."

She stood beside Ed Wynn, watching the curtain swing. He chuckled nervously close to her ear. "Good girl," he said, fidgeting his small hands. "Good girl." And her heart was bursting because she was in the *Follies* and Jay would see her at last as the actress she was.

She danced as if in a trance. From the moment they wrapped her in the Persian rug and carried her onstage, she was the princess; in the final moment when she ran up the great stairs and hurled herself over the wall, it was as if to death. Strong arms lifted her from the mattresses which broke her fall, wrapped her in a robe, and led her to her dressing room.

"Good Lord," Jenny said. "You lost part of your costume, child." She stared in the mirror, herself again. She hadn't known or missed the lost chiffon, but had the audience!

Her dressing room was banked with flowers. Jack deSaulles must have bought out a florist. The blooms spilled over into the hall. She looked through the cards during intermission. Strangely, no word from Jay. From the wings, she studied the boxes. He usually sat in the first box on the right. Jack de-



FLORENCE VANDAM

Irving Berlin found Mae Murray dancing in a cabaret, gave her her big break in his show, *Watch Your Step*.



Irene and Vernon Castle starred in Berlin's hit. When Irene became ill, Mae had four hours to replace her.



Mae Murray, one of Broadway's loveliest young ingénues, posed for this picture before going to Hollywood to begin movie career.



CULVER SERVICE

William Randolph Hearst, publishing tycoon, entertained Mae, Marion Davies, Marilyn Miller, and other favorites at lavish parties. Mae later visited his great ranch, San Simeon.



Etching by James Montgomery Flagg, noted illustrator. Mae posed while making film in New York.



CULVER SERVICE

Florenz Ziegfeld, glorifier of American girls, gave Mae show-stopping spot in his *Follies* which led to her film contract.



Marilyn Miller, Ziegfeld star, accompanied Mae to impresario's office in New Amsterdam Theater when he engaged her for the *Follies*.

Mae posed for this studio still before making first film, *To Have and to Hold*, with popular star Wallace Reid.

Olive Thomas, called "the most beautiful girl in the world," appeared with Mae in *Follies*.





Jesse Lasky, Adolph Zukor, Sam Goldwyn, and Cecil B. deMille (left to right), movie pioneers, organized Famous Players Lasky which became Paramount. DeMille directed Mae in *Dream Girl*.

Bob Leonard (on ground) and Mae clowning on location at Lake Tahoe during filming of *The Plow Girl*. Mae married Leonard, who directed her in series of popular movies.



Saulles' party sat there. "The Astors," someone said, pointing to the first box, stage left. He'd arrive backstage casually, if she knew Jay. He'd probably bring her a whole box of gardenias; but where was he now?

For the second act she had to go out and around to the front of the house. Her next number worried her. But what stopped the show was this—the Merry Pickum number! She couldn't understand, she felt she had so little to do, standing on the dark stage while the great white face moved, a pale balloon across the screen. But when the film faded and lights went on, she had to come back again and again for curtain calls. She kissed her hands to them, to Jay wherever he was. Somehow that gray motionless picture had scored a hit and he could be proud.

Backstage fever was mounting, the show had built built toward this finale. They all crowded on and came off giddy with triumph.

"You've got it," Jeanne Eagels brushed past the banked flowers to clasp her hand. "You've got it, young one."

"Our girl!" Mr. Dillingham said.

There were messages from everyone she'd ever known in New York.

"I'm George M. Cohan, may I tell you how..."

Flowers from Vernon Castle. Flowers from Frank Tinney.

"Lovely, Mae," Billie Burke poked her head in and blew a kiss.

"Oh you beautiful doll," Berlin wrote.

One card puzzled her. "Come and see me. I wish to talk with you." It was signed Adolph Zukor. She'd never heard of him.

"Jenny, go through all the flowers again, you've overlooked a card I'm sure."

Ziegfeld's uniformed boy brought his silver tray with a telegram: THE GREATEST COMPLIMENT AN AUDIENCE COULD PAY, THEY PAID YOU. NO ONE LAUGHED, THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOW YOUR COSTUME WAS HALF MISSING. CONGRATULATIONS. ZIEGFELD.

She closed the door, trying not to let the joy fade out of this night.

"Now dohn go breaking your heart," Jenny said. "He'll be showing up any minute now. You know Mr. Jay."

She tried to believe it. She took a long time to change. She wore white satin. But he did not come. He'd let her open in the *Follies* alone.

By the time she came out, almost everyone had gone. Stagehands were finishing up in the glare of a ghostly light. She wandered onto the dark stage. Rows and rows of empty seats, the night watchman making his lonely rounds, she could see the winking flashlight eye. Very quietly she stood trying to get back to peace. Some people knelt in church and smelled incense. Here was the mustiness of old wood and dusty props, varnish and grease paint, an incense too. Let it fill her. Let it block out everything.

Stagehands doused the light and now there was nothing but the watchman's tiny beam. Here I am safe, she thought, this is mine.

"Come on now," Jenny called from the wings. "You come on home, I'll warm you some milk."

Her steps beat a dirge on the empty boards. She started to run, as fast as she could, out the stage door. Someone stepped from the shadows, caught and held her.

Not Jay. No.

"Rudy! You waited . . . Thank you for . . . your flowers," she sobbed. Tears rushed over her little face and he held her.

"Go on, Murray, cry—you'll feel better. I understand."

"You don't, you couldn't."

"I've known for a long time. I wish you'd never see him again. I wish you didn't want to see him."

4



She wakened early every day in time for the postman, eager for a message in Jay's cryptic scrawl. None came. What did come were a number of letters signed *Adolph Zukor*. Would she please come down to the office of Famous Players, he wanted to see her, she was motion picture material.

Adolph Zukor was a former fur merchant of Hungarian parentage who had quit the fur business ten years before to invest in penny arcades, had graduated to nickelodeons, and revolutionized the young motion-picture industry by securing the rights to a four-reel French film, *Queen Elizabeth*, starring Sarah Bernhardt. The premiere of this picture at the Lyceum Theater in New York had been an historic event. For the first time the elite of the theatre turned out for a movie, a *four-reel movie*. Zukor's company now devoted itself to "famous players in famous plays" and the mild-mannered Zukor had been raiding Broadway for talent.

Mae, absorbed in her own world, had never heard of him and his letters went into the waste basket. Except for Jay—and surely Jay would be back—she was leading the life she'd dreamed: the *Follies* and parties every night afterward, at

cabarets, at hotels, at millionaires' homes. Harry Payne Whitney, George J. Gould, Cornelius Vanderbilt, the Astors and the Stotesburys all gave lavish parties. Society was show-business-minded. Cornelius Vanderbilt had a theatre built behind his house at Newport and had been known to transport a show in toto for private performances. The Four Hundred had the money to pamper their tastes, and the taste to live as they pleased. The Goulds still kept their butlers in satin knee breeches. Diamond Jim Brady gave extravagant parties; so did William Randolph Hearst. Tall, distinguished Mr. Hearst, with his deep-set eyes, hair parted in the center, was an excellent dancer with vitality and zest. Often he would come backstage to say he'd engaged a ballroom, and he'd send his car and secretary for Mae and Olive, for Ann Pennington, and Marion Davies who was working upstairs on the Roof. Hearst adored Marion. The girls wore evening dress every night, were called on at the parties to do their specialties, and were much admired. Mae found a rich sustaining vibrance in this world, she loved these peoples' individuality.

She asked Hearst if he minded the awful things said about him (they said he was an exploiter of sensationalism), and he laughed. She asked him why he used only paper napkins—the most exquisite glass and china, caviar in great blocks of ice, the serviettes were especially made, but why of paper? Because he wanted only sterile things to touch his lips, he said, and laughed again.

"You are a curious little girl."

"How else would I ever know anything?"

"I could use a dozen reporters with just that point of view."

"Very well. If the theatre ever grows dull, I'll work for you."

One day at an auction she bid against him for a small statue of Jesus, the Infant of Prague. She didn't realize it was a holy figure but she loved it. Mr. Hearst bid four hundred dollars, she bid four hundred and twenty-five.

"How will you ever pay for it?" he asked.

"I'll bring one hundred dollars a week."

He studied her quizzically, knowing it would take almost her entire salary. That was spunk. He liked spunk and he liked beauty. Every Sunday in his *Journal* there was a full page in color of a Ziegfeld beauty. One Sunday in October it was Mae.

The photographer wanted to come to her apartment but she wouldn't allow that. No one was allowed in that apartment except herself and Jenny. Did birds permit intruders in their nests? Instead, she brought Blue and Tiger, Silver Sam, Mauve Kitten and Shimmer to the theatre. The pictures were taken in her dressing room. With each picture there was a flash of light and a small explosion that smelled of singed powder. She didn't enjoy that and neither did the Persians, but the pictures came out young and dreamy; she looked well in profile, surrounded by kittens. After that she went to a photographer of her own and had many pictures made in all sorts of poses and different moods: pensive, pert, alluring, sleeping, even with her eyes closed. "She looks very well asleep," Mae thought, seeing herself as audiences saw her, as Mr. Hearst saw her when he studied her quizzically, as Mr. Ziegfeld saw her. She was always inside the girl but outside her, too.

It tickled her one night when she received a curt message from Mr. Ziegfeld. "Come as you are. Immediately, please."

She still had on make-up, her hair was hanging in loose curls, she had just slipped into a big warm bathrobe. Imagine having to run down the iron steps to confront the meticulous Mr. Z. in an unsightly robe.

He smiled his wry little smile. The bland gentleman beside him smiled too.

"This is Mr. Adolph Zukor, the most influential man in motion pictures. He has written you a number of letters and received no answer. This isn't very polite, my dear."

"I didn't think I needed to answer. There was nothing to say."

"I want my girls to get ahead. And this is a step ahead. Let's just make an appointment with Mr. Zukor."

"But Mr. Ziegfeld, I want to do a big musical comedy some day. I want to star in it!"

How he laughed!

She took a quick breath. "I do beg your pardon about the letters, Mr. Zukor. I esteem good manners, I just didn't think..."

He wasn't much taller than she—smooth-faced, quiet, so slight he could almost have slid into one of the coin-machine slots at the old penny arcade; but his eyes were sharp, his words deliberate. "Shall we say tomorrow at two? At least hear what we have in mind."

What he had in mind was that she could be a big star in pictures. He'd thought so ever since he'd seen the "Merry Pickum" number opening night. He listened patiently while she explained that she wasn't interested in movies.

"Moving pictures are the coming thing, little lady. They're out of the boob stage. We don't shoot them in barns any more, we have large studios. The day of the nickelodeon is over too. Do you realize some of the handsomest theatres on Broadway, the Mark Strand for example, are showing *films* only and class audiences pay two dollars a ticket?"

She did not realize. When she thought of a star it was a Broadway star, living flesh and blood.

"Vernon and Irene Castle have just made a movie with my friend Oliver Bailey. Vernon wrote the script himself. Walter Hampden's in Hollywood. Richard Bennett's filming his play *Damaged Goods*. Our studio has Marie Doro, Pauline Frederick, Marguerite Clark, Florence Reed, John Barrymore, and a half-dozen others. I've just signed Gaby Deslys and Ina Claire."

He paused and let her assimilate that. Why in the world *would* Ina Claire or Gaby leave the stage?

"Film stars play to audiences you couldn't dream of on Broadway," he went on. "Mary Pickford is the most famous girl in this country, 'America's Sweetheart,' they call her; when I renew her contract it will be a million-dollar deal."

Mr. Zukor talked on rapidly, without emphasis. His partner Jesse Lasky had snagged prima donna Geraldine Farrar for three pictures. For eight weeks' work—twenty thousand dollars. "More. We're renting a house for her, supplying her with servants and a motor car. We roll out the red carpet."

"For me too?"

He smiled at her as if she were a child. "Bright red carpet, big brass band."

Hadn't her father smiled at her that way? She remembered him, tying a red sash at her waist, putting a velvet tam on her curls and painting her picture—all the while smiling whimsically. Or maybe she'd dreamed it. Her father was a pretty vague memory. Anyhow, she liked Mr. Zukor and promised to think it over.

"I'd like to put you in a picture with Wallace Reid. You've certainly seen him?"

She shook her head.

"You haven't seen *Birth of a Nation*?"

She shook her head again. "I've only seen Mabel Normand. I like her. She's full of life."

"So are you," he said gently. "Think it over."

She didn't think of it at all.

"I saw Mr. Zukor, the man from the motion-picture company," she told Rudy. "Did you know Broadway stars are being signed for pictures? Why would anyone want to leave New York? I wouldn't."

Rudy agreed. Who would want to leave New York except for Paris? He loved Paris, he dreamed of dancing at the Lido or the Café de Paris. He dreamed of many things—of painting, of writing, perhaps more of writing than of anything else, although he still didn't think in English but in Italian. But in his daydreams, he knew he wasn't always going to haul heavy old women around dance floors. The more he was seen dancing with Bonnie Glass, the more in demand Rudy was. He and Bonnie had appeared at a number of private parties; they were going to do another benefit, at Rector's this time, and

there was talk of an engagement at the Winter Garden.

"Someday, I would like to dance at the Lido, in Paris. I can see it," he said, "Rudy and Mae . . ."

"We will be famous stars then. We will meet in Paris. You will always be my friend, Rudy."

They walked along, arm in arm through the crowd on Fifth Avenue. Everyone was hurrying somewhere. She'd read that this was a hard pleasure-loving generation. It made her laugh. Everyone in New York seemed eager to her, running out to meet life on wings—like Rudy, whose supple stride paced hers.

"Don't you feel free, Rudy? Don't you love to feel free?"

"Free, yes. Lonely, no."

"I'm never lonely. I used to run away, even as a little girl. My grandmother'd leave me in convents and I'd run away. Do you know I came to New York first when I was twelve? I wasn't lonely, I was only hungry and I told a policeman." She giggled, remembering. "That was a mistake. He called everywhere until he found my grandmother."

He listened, intently, his face serious. He was always serious, seldom smiled. What he wanted, he confessed, more than anything in the world was a family. To be married, to have a wife and children and a home. He had a feeling that this was what most people wanted. Most people were lonely. The dowagers with frizzled hair who danced in his arms, they were lonely too. Life wasn't forever. He had a premonition that he would not live long. While he lived, he wanted to belong.

They stopped in front of Maxim's. "It would be better to have a home than to be a prince in a palace," he said, sweeping off his hat, bowing his splendid head.

"I will not see you tonight? You'll be at Mr. Ziegfeld's party?"

"Rudy, go out tonight. There are dozens of girls dying to dance with you. Find yourself a girl."

"I have found a girl." He gave her his gallant little bow and vanished into his "palace."

She was early. She could saunter back to the theatre, wash her face with Pear's soap, pat on the eating cream, relax, make up, plan what she would wear later to Mr. Ziegfeld's party.

It was their thirtieth performance; he'd taken the New York Roof Garden, and in the dark soft air girls seemed to float and flutter like tall silken flowers: pink, mauve, blue, green, white, the men moving among them narrow and black as bees. All was dark and dulcet, the sky salted with stars, languid music carried on the light wind.

Jay arrived late, in his usual swift, careless fashion. A clamor rose around him. "Jay, oh Jay, Jay, Jay!" the girls gravitated toward him. But he came directly to her, taking her arm in his without a glance, he turned to the others.

"Kay, dear lady, you were ravishing in your Spanish number . . . Justine . . . Olive . . . Ann, you have every man in the audience at your feet at that first-act curtain."

"You've seen the show!"

"Seen it, dear? Every night since you opened."

He turned to chat with Ziegfeld, kissed Billie Burke's hand, praised her gown. He kept Mae's arm cradled in his, his fingers on her wrist.

He'd been there every night! And not a word to her. Now he had glowing praise for everyone but her. She felt a withering wave of shame. What kind of a man was he? And why did she put up with him? Her heart moved painfully, she could barely breathe. Jay pulled out her chair, and sat down beside her.

"Your mouth is still the same hot menace, dear lady," he whispered. "Are you longing for me as I am for you?"

She shuddered, attracted and repelled, fearful of her mixed emotions toward Jay.

"Will you excuse me? I left my compact in the ladies' room, Jay."

"Hurry back, dear."

She hurried—into the service elevator, into a cab, and home. All about her in the balmy night people were moving with a

carefree air and she was no part of it. She sat in the cab feeling trapped. Jay was claiming her again. She knew how importunate and relentless he could be. It would always be the same, a show of tenderness, then the back of his hand. He was spoiled and cruel; but she had to face it, he had some awful power over her. She didn't know how to cope with him.

Next day, early, she went to see Mr. Zukor.

"When can I go to Hollywood?" she asked.

"Just as soon as you've completed your contract with Ziegfeld." He pushed a button. "Get Flo Ziegfeld for me, dear. . . . You've made a wise decision, Mae. . . . Hello, Flo? Little Mae Murray has decided to become a movie star. Umhum. Umhum. January. We'll take good care of her, Flo. . . . Dear, get me Jesse Lasky in Hollywood. . . . Jesse, we're signing Mae Murray of the Ziegfeld *Follies*. Yes, the Pickum number. No, nothing like Pickford. She's a naïve, *sensuous* blonde girl with bee-stung lips. A very elusive personality. Ingénue eyes, Irish coquetry. . . . January. Transfer me to DeMille, will you, Jesse? I want to know what he has lined up for Reid. You know that book we bought, *Sweet Kitty Bellairs*? It might be just the thing for Reid and Murray."

It began to excite her. She'd read the novel, *Sweet Kitty Bellairs*; they seemed to know about her in Hollywood. Some of it she didn't understand, but they were talking now about a house and a maid and a drawing room on the train; starting salary, three hundred.

"Before the year is out, you'll be making a thousand," Zukor told her, "or I'll miss my guess."

But all she asked really was to escape from Jay, to be free again. For the first time in months, she felt light-hearted, as she floated down from Zukor's office out onto Fifth Avenue. In January she'd be on the train on her way to stardom, the red carpet, the brass band.

When she walked right into him on the street, she stood stunned for an instant, then blurted:

"Jay, I'm going to Hollywood!"

"Indeed, I thought perhaps you'd gone last night."

"I'm sorry about last night, Jay. Believe me, it's going to be better for both of us when I'm gone. We're very bad friends, you and I."

"Isn't that because your prim, weird middle-class morality insists on friendship? I've never *wanted* to be your friend!"

"Jay, be happy *with* me. It's a wonderful opportunity. In New York I've been just a potential."

"I wish you all the best," he said coldly. "I trust you will marry some stout producer and bear him a number of sons who'll grow up to be Keystone cops."

"Jay, you don't understand. I've signed a contract, I'm going to make pictures. I'm going to work."

He sighed deeply; for a moment she was very proud of him, he was suffering so nobly. He hailed a taxi and handed her in.

"Drive up Hudson Parkway," he told the driver.

"What drives me mad is your cool lack of involvement, Mae. I wouldn't even mind if you hated me. But you've never felt a thoroughgoing emotion in your life." He became suddenly violent. "Hate me or love me, but for God's sake, with passion."

His voice broke. He began to sob fiercely. Shocked, she could only hold onto him. She'd never seen a man cry before. Her face was wet with his tears.

"Don't, Jay. Don't. I'll marry you. Just let me go to Hollywood and fulfill my contract." She didn't recognize the voice, saying what she'd never intended to say.

He was himself at once. "You come back or I'll come and get you," he said.

She never did understand why she'd promised.

She pondered it as the train raced through Ohio, picking up speed. Jay had taken her to the train, he had stayed until the last, until they'd started moving, he'd left a note crushed in her pocket, his eyes hard as Svengali's. But he was gone, vanished, swept away and she was free again. The wheels beat a resonant tattoo. Dark gathered, stained the outside world, and the train sped on, luminous. She could see its

shadow sliding across fields, leaping a hill. She smoothed her gray skirt and Blue jumped up, snuggled down on her lap, shivering against the noise. She'd had to give all the other cats away. "There, there, kitten," stroking and soothing him until he went to sleep. Then she opened her book, a life of Bernhardt. It was an old friend; she'd read it at the library many times, now she'd bought a copy to sustain her in the new world. Blue and Bernhardt. During the night, Blue mewed so shrilly the conductor took him to another compartment.

For her arrival, Mae wakened early and dressed with care. A little red-and-white checked suit, red shoes, a big red hat. She poked her head out the train door, eyes wide with anticipation, one small foot arched in its red shoe.

No carpet! A few sleepy porters trundling carts in the hot sun, and down the platform a bunch of red roses. The roses came toward her. From behind them emerged a pleasant-looking man in sport coat and cap. He mopped his hot face.

"Miss Murray? I'm Jenkins, Paramount Personnel Department. Mr. Lasky asked me to say hello and welcome you to..."

"Where's the band?" she cried.

"I beg your pardon."

"I thought...I was promised my train would be met with..."

He laughed. "A band? No. We're corny, but not as corny as you sophisticated New Yorkers would make us out. May I have your baggage checks?"

She managed a slight smile. "Will you ask the conductor about my cat? He's a lovely Persian with orange eyes. He was so nervous, out of Chicago, they called in a veterinary and moved him into the next car, into a room of his own. He has a carrying basket."

"Don't worry," Jenkins said.

"He's all I brought with me."

She sat in the limousine, with a lap full of roses, waiting for the kitten. The sun was terribly hot. It would never do to cry.

All the people passing saw her in the limousine and knew she was . . . but *would* they know, without a red carpet, without a brass band?

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Murray, your cat died," Jenkins said. "Do you mind if we go straight to the Studio? I believe Mr. Lasky wants to give you the script of *To Have and To Hold*."

She didn't dare ask him what had happened to the script of *Sweet Kitty Bellairs*. She just sat quietly, stroking the flowers, feeling very much alone.

5



Kick it!" yelled the director and hot light jumped out from a dozen monstrous eyes. "O.K! Action... *Camera!*"

She leaned against the door. That's all there was, two walls, a fireplace and a door; she leaned against the door praying that *he* wouldn't try to beat it down. *He* was Wally Reid, playing Captain Ralph Percy, the dashing planter; and she was among the indentured maidens just arrived from England to be the planters' brides in *To Have and To Hold*.

"You hear *footsteps!*" shouted director George Melford. "You retreat to the corner. This may be a *wild man*, you may have to GIVE yourself. *Tremble...* the door is *opening...* For chrissake, you're out of camera range!" He was bellowing like a bull. "CUT! *Save it,*" he yelled. The lights went out and she could see him. "*Miss Murray. You are not dancing in the Follies!* There are chalk lines on the floor. Certainly they're visible. Stay within them."

In a fury, he yanked off his coat and threw it to the floor. He was wearing a loudly striped shirt, a vest, a pin high on his

satin tie. He looked like a clown, if he wanted to know, a *clown*.

"Don't let him throw you," Wally said softly. He took her hand and led her through the door, out into nothing. "Watch me," He imitated the action. "Don't move too much."

Wallace Reid was already a screen veteran and a popular star. At nineteen, he'd arrived in Hollywood with his dad, Hal, who had been signed to write and act. Wally's idea was to become a cameraman. The casting director at Vitagraph took one look at his handsome face with its blue eyes and strongly curved brows, at his athletic six-foot frame, and put him in front of the camera instead of behind it. His romantic good looks and his torso, almost all of it bared for the role of the Indian in *The Deerslayer*, launched Wally; but he'd stepped into real notice as the blacksmith in Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and had become a feminine heart-throb with his role opposite Geraldine Farrar in *Carmen*. An easygoing man of twenty-four now, he loved music, played the piano, the organ, the violin, guitar and banjo, the drums, the saxophone and the viola; when he wasn't needed on the set, he played the violin in his dressing room or played records on his portable victrola. Sure of himself, he wasn't intimidated by the studio brass, least of all by Director Melford.

"He's just a combustible Irishman but he's broken in more new stars than anyone in the business," Wally told her.

"Broken in or broken down?" she said. "Why does he yell so, I'm not deaf."

"They call him 'Whispering George'—it used to be you could hear him within a radius of three miles, barring competition from a boiler factory. You should have heard him then! He's calmed down now, he can only be heard for a dozen blocks or so."

"OK, Miss Murray, if you *don't* mind," Melford called sarcastically.

"Don't worry, I'll carry you," Wally said. "Keep your chin up."

She stepped back through the door. A property man rushed over with a bottle and a dropper.

"Can I give you some tears?"

She was puzzled.

"You're going to cry in this scene, for tears we use glycerine."

"I never heard of such a thing. How silly. I'll cry."

"Now, Miss Murray. The camera is here. You do see the chalk lines? Keep your arms *down*, your hands *clasped*. I know it's difficult for a dancer but..."

"I'm a pantomimic dancer *and* actress," she said clearly.

"And I'm your director. Boys, yank that pulley, swing that curtain another foot, sun's getting through. Shall we begin? Kick it! Action... *Camera!*"

This time she had no difficulty crying. As Kimp Ward, she clenched her hands and tears overflowed. The door opened. Captain Ralph Percy walked into the room, a great, gentle human being with great dilated eyes. He looked so kind—certainly this man would give her time. Perhaps some day she could even make him understand she had been jailed with harlots and thieves, indentured by mistake. The scene went on.

"KNEEL AT THE FIREPLACE," roared Melford, "busy yourself brushing ashes..."

She knelt. A flood of raw, blinding light flared up at her. At that moment the planter moved forward as if to take her arm. This called for surprise. She was about to register surprise, perhaps even shock, when a gun exploded so close she jumped with fright.

"Good. *Cut*," roared the director.

Trembling, she clung to Wally, who tried to calm her.

"A blank cartridge," Melford said. "To help you register shock. Worked fine."

"For you, not for me. I'm an *actress*, not a trained seal." She ran from the set.

"The way that kid walks, she'll fly right off the screen one of these days," someone said.

"Melford's got his hands full."



MUSEUM OF MODERN ART FILM LIBRARY

Betty Francisco autographs Wallace Reid's shirt on set of *Midsummer Madness*. A great matinee idol of silent screen era, Reid died of dope addiction at height of his career.

In *The Mormon Maid*, directed by Bob Leonard, Mae escaped pursuit by Indians and ran up fragile elm tree, to the consternation of entire company.

PARAMOUNT





M-G-M

Basil Rathbone appeared opposite Mae, who played dashing French girl in *The Masked Bride*, a story of Paris night life.



In *Peacock Alley* Mae wore lavish peacock costume in role of French dancer who marries New Englander.

Mae and Bob Leonard on location for *The Plow Girl*. Mae played innocent farm girl in story of African veldt.

PARAMOUNT





In *Peacock Alley*, Mae's first independent production with Bob Leonard, she impersonated her idol Sarah Bernhardt in a memorable scene.



Wearing horns and red wig, Mae did bull dance in *Fascination*, which was shot in Spain, Cuba, and New York studios.



In *Fashion Row* Mae acted dual role of Russian sisters, Zita and Olga. As Olga, Mae wore 13-inch platform shoes.

Mae, as Olga Farinova, Russian cabaret dancer who became the rage of Broadway and made society marriage by claiming royal blood. *Fashion Row* broke movie tradition by dispensing with double exposure.



She ran faster. Sarah Bernhardt had run right out of the greatest theatre in France when she was a kid. In her dressing room Mae flung off her prim cap and dress, put on her own clothes and went home. But it wasn't home. It was a perfectly good house up on Vine Street and a perfectly nice maid; but it wasn't Jenny and it wasn't home; there wasn't even a kitten. She choked down some dinner, washed her hair, arranged it on little curl papers and went to bed. Her troubled dreams reflected something that had actually happened on the lot. She'd heard a group of actresses in the washroom talking. They hadn't known she was there.

"... absolutely no experience."

"Why do you suppose they signed *her*?"

"Well, now why do *you* suppose..."

A suggestive snicker made her rush out crying, "I have in-born talent, you hear? *Inborn*. I know by instinct all you've learned and a lot you'll never learn."

Only in the dream they threw sand at her. Her eyes were filled with sand, she wakened wild with pain, rolled out of bed to the floor, crawled to the door shrieking, she was blind! A doctor came. He dropped cocaine on her scalding eyeballs and told her never, never to look into kleig lights, the horrible white blaze from the fireplace.

"Those lights should be covered," he said. "It's criminal."

"No one gives a damn," Wally told her. "We've all had kleig eyes. Sometimes the pain lasts for weeks. I keep a flask handy."

It was a strange alley she'd wandered into in her headlong flight from Jay, no camaraderie or gaiety. Wally was kind to her, but he had his own life, his fast cars, his music, his magic tricks, his pretty wife Dorothy, and his beautiful house up on DeLongpre. She walked past it sometimes at night, a great mysterious Moorish house softly lighted by fringed lamps. One room was dark; that's where he showed movies. Every night! No one out here danced, no one was interested in anything except movies. They ate, slept, dreamed *movies*.

And with the exception of Wally, no one paid the slightest attention to her. Hundreds of people rushed into the studio every day and rushed away every night, giving each other no more notice than people in an impersonal, passing crowd.

Blanche Sweet was on the lot making *The Sowers* with Tom Meighan. Mae remembered him from the hit play *On Trial*, written by a young lawyer named Elmer Reizenstein who was so thrilled with his first success that he'd given up law now and was writing more plays under the name of Elmer Rice. Marie Doro was on the lot making a film of her stage success *Oliver Twist*. Mae would have loved to see her, and Tully Marshall of the stage. She did catch sight one day of Pauline Frederick; walking rapidly across the lot, she vanished behind the truncated hull of a ship that stood leaning on an artificial palm tree. Although Mae quickened her own pace, there wasn't another glimpse of Miss Frederick. She kept her chin high, reminding herself that she had always liked being alone. But never like this, never like a rank outsider. In New York there was such a sense of shared vitality and play, everyone bustling along Fifth Avenue like smiling members of a *corps de ballet*! This Hollywood was all relentless business.

In a sense, she was right. Only three years ago, ex-cornet-player, ex-vaudeville-producer Jesse Lasky had started a movie company with ex-glove-salesman Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) and ex-actor Cecil B. DeMille. Their first production, *The Squaw Man*, had proved a gold mine. So had their second, *Brewster's Millions*. Now the company had merged with Zukor's Famous Players and their studio—Paramount—was the most successful in the business. They controlled a galaxy of stars; they had assumed direct control of the distribution of their pictures, the first momentous step in integration of production and distribution. None of these people had known anything about film-making; they were learning as they went along—everyone was learning, including the cameramen and crew. There was a sense of violent competition between companies, between actors, between directors; the cost of produc-

tion was going up, star salaries were rising, the rental fees on pictures had quadrupled in five years. It was a hectic business, and to this ingénue, it had no appeal at all.

At night, wandering up into the sleeping hills above Hollywood, she'd occasionally meet an old hermit with long hair and a beard, the only human being she ever saw alive in the night; he'd pass her striding downhill, prodding the earth with his staff. He would smile and give her a benediction, she was sure of it. He was the one kindred soul. She'd walk along the firebreaks in the hills, watching the lights flung out over the city's length, no flash and flare like the fireworks of Broadway. She'd wander alone half the night and wake up tired the next day. She hated the break-of-dawn work schedule they kept. No one had bothered to tell her what time to report, so the first week she was late every day. This would have been enough to antagonize everyone on the set from the prop men to Wally Reid. There was a great deal that she didn't know. A make-up man wanted to put heavy dark powder all over her face, dark red over her eyes and plenty of black pencil around them. When she insisted on doing her own make-up, just as she had in the theatre, he'd have nothing more to do with her. He wouldn't even say "Good morning."

She'd run into her dressing room every day, put on her costume, do her own make-up, then jump onto a scenery truck and ride over to the set. Once she talked to the man who cranked the camera. His name was Charlie Rosher and she'd noticed that from time to time he'd move a chair or shift a table and move reflectors so that the scene wasn't lighted evenly all over but that some light shone directly on her, more in a happy scene than in a sad scene. He wasn't just a stooge of the director, he was doing something on his own. He tried a mercury-vapor lamp which threw a cold light; he'd look through the camera and then call out to the electricians to change the reflectors, then he'd look again.

"Charlie," she said, "the make-up man is mad at me. How do I look in the camera?"

"You'd be better with dark powder, but you're a kid, you can get by."

"I feel like myself; this way, I can do better." But she never did know for sure what she was expected to do. She didn't even know when it was they broke for lunch. They'd be rehearsing, then abruptly Melford would walk away—it might just mean he was angry—and she'd stand around waiting for more to happen, not wanting to appear dumb. Not until Dorothy Reid came onto the set, bringing a basket with Wally's lunch, did Mae know for *sure*. Her maid came every day too, with a thermos of soup, a sandwich and coffee. After lunch she'd curl up in her dressing room and go to sleep. A rude summons wakened her, Melford's errand boy pounding on the door; and when she'd get to the set it was "Well, good *morn-ing*, Miss Murray. I hope we're not disturbing you. You were out late last night perhaps?"

Suppressed laughter.

"Walking in the hills," she said, and there was more laughter.

What did the others do at night? Charlie Rosher told her they went to see rushes. So one night she slipped into the projection room too and watched the gray shadow of a girl looking stiff and unnatural, with a big white blob of a face. What on earth is that thing, she thought.

"If you don't hold your hands quiet, I'll have to tie 'em," Melford had yelled. That's how they looked too, tied and lifeless.

When everyone had gone, she cornered the projectionist.

"Would you run that again? I'll pay you five dollars."

He ran it again. He agreed to meet her every night after the regular rushes and run the film over and over.

"Why don't these people like me?" she asked the projectionist.

"I like you."

"Mr. Zukor pleaded with me to sign a contract and now that I'm here, they treat me like an interloper."

"You're different. All the others are either old-timers at

movies or they're from the legit. They don't think much of dancers out here. They don't figure a dancer can act."

"That's why they fire guns?"

He grinned. "I don't say Melford's the easiest to get along with, but you'll be okay. You look very pretty."

"Pretty isn't enough. Look at that wooden girl up there, she's crying for pantomime. *Something* has to take the place of words. You could almost do a picture like an interpretive dance."

"Dance!" he snorted. "It's not in their agenda."

"Don't actors count? I'd like to see them film their agenda without actors."

They went to Catalina ("on location" it was called) to shoot the beginning of the picture, the arrival of the "doves" on the coast of Virginia. The sailing vessel was very impressive, every detail perfect. They paid more attention to the historical detail of their props, evidently, than they paid to their actors. The island was rugged and beautiful. She could see goats walking about high on the hill. Wally disappeared with his portable phonograph and his violin; everyone else disappeared, she walked up the hill to see the goats—and never got back. The way was steep, the underbrush tangly. After a while, she lost sight of the ship completely. It was frightening only because she could imagine Melford stalking about like an angry bull.

If he treated her properly, she could give him something on screen. Maybe she wasn't as experienced as the others, but she knew she could act, if he gave her half a chance. There was nothing to do now but relax and let them find her. She found a windbreak and settled down behind it, wrapping her narrow little skirt about her, watching the sky change, lose its blue, become colorless and calm before the dark. She saw lanterns waving about like fireflies and called out to the searchers; but her voice was carried away by the wind. They found her in the morning when she'd fallen fast asleep.

"You sure can get into trouble," Melford said, when she was brought in. He glared as if she were Peck's bad girl. "Next

time you're interested in scenery let *us* know. We lost half a day's shooting."

Evidently Wally hadn't shown up yesterday either. He was ill, someone said. She wondered if he'd been tilting that flask. They worked on the disembarking scene, the girls standing on board ship, their names on signs pinned to their cloaks. No one talked to her all day. When Wally showed up at dinner, he brought along the evening papers.

"You got yourself a barrel of publicity, little one." The papers carried dramatic stories about the ex-*Follies* girl lost on the wild mountainside, illustrated with several large pictures from the Ziegfeld file. "The girl with the bee-stung lips," they called her. A stack of telegrams from Jay was waiting when she returned to Los Angeles. He'd read the papers, he'd been trying to reach her by phone.

"Everything's wonderful," she told him, when he called again. "I'm learning a lot."

She was learning at night, in the projection room. The young man who ran the film told her there were stills in the next room, would she like to see those too? They weren't much, these stills, not nearly as good as the photographs she'd had taken in New York. Too quick, too sharp, she looked like a girl dressed up for a masquerade. She tore them to pieces and tossed them in the waste basket.

The projectionist seemed terribly upset. "My God, you shouldn't have done that!"

"Don't worry, they're my pictures."

Next morning she was summoned from the set to Mr. DeMille's office. She was very glad to be noticed finally by the working head of the studio. He sat behind a massive desk at the far end of a long suite.

"Miss Mae Murray," his secretary said.

Mr. DeMille continued to study papers. She took a step forward, waited, and another step.

"Mr. DeMille? You sent for me!"

No answer.

"Mr. DeMille," the words fairly exploded. "You are no gentlemen to keep a lady waiting! You don't even stand when she enters the room."

He looked up surprised. "I'm busy, Miss Murray."

"Mr. Ziegfeld is busy too, but he doesn't keep me waiting and he stands when I make my entrance. Mr. Ziegfeld treats us like queens!"

He laughed. "That's New York. This is Hollywood."

"And I don't like it. I wish I'd never come."

"What an obstreperous youngster! Melfords tells me you're hard to handle and I believe it. Do you realize, last night you deliberately destroyed property belonging to this studio?"

Her look was blank.

"Those pictures you tore."

"They weren't any good and they were my pictures."

"But our property. We have the negatives, Miss Murray, we can make as many prints as we wish."

She stomped her foot. "I want to go home. Please, send me home."

Cecil B. DeMille rose and walked around in front of his desk. At thirty-five he'd found his stride and had a keen eye. In the plays he'd written with his brother William and in his first films, he liked to cut back from the past to the present. If he had been doing this scene, he would have cut back to Viola in *Twelfth Night*. As he stood there in his breeches and riding boots, shoulders slack, hands thrust in his pockets, the brown eyes under the bald dome of his head were suddenly very kind.

"Maybe you'd like to tell me why you feel so strongly about those stills."

She took a deep breath. "I've been squashed. Those pictures aren't me, they're nothing. Mr. Melford thinks I'm just a dancer, he jerks me about like a puppet, shooting guns and yelling at me. I hate this heavy downbeat character, I hate his shouting, and the picture's going to be dreadful! No one stood over me yelling in the *Follies*. I was free to do what I liked.

Free me just once, Mr. DeMille. If I'm not a success, you can send me home."

He shook his head. "Let's see what we can do with *Sweet Kitty Bellairs*. You'll probably like the part better." He paused and thought about it. "She's livelier. This is the part that got Jane Cowl started in the theatre. You read the book, you know the story? Good, let me have your ideas."

"I must have music," she said quickly.

The smooth bald dome wrinkled. "You mean for the minuet?"

"I mean before every scene I'm in. Music opens doors for me, sets a mood. I'll pay for the musicians, Mr. DeMille, don't worry about that."

He smiled.

"I'll want a piano and violin and either a flute or cornet. I'll be much better, you'll see, if I can have music instead of a wild man yelling at me."

They indulged her whim and let her have her music. It was the laughing stock of the studio.

"Do you really have to have that?" DeMille asked one day, visiting the set.

Director James Young shrugged his shoulders.

Mae smiled like the roguish and lovable Kitty, swung her magnificent satin Gainsborough skirt and climbed into her sedan chair. The music was gay and tender. She and Wally gazed into each other's eyes, getting into the mood for their love scene. Wally liked music, it suited his mood. He even had a phonograph concealed in a lamp in his dressing room. Sometimes she wondered where he was, he moved so casually through the scenes, while she really *worked*. With her it was now or never.

"You stand where I can see you," she told the director. "I can tell from your face when I've done something wrong."

The lights went on, the musicians stopped playing.

"Speak your dialogue clearly, remember, the audience *can*

read your lips. Wally, Wally, come back to us . . . look at her . . . good. Camera."

She loved Kitty's great velvet hat with its sweeping plumes and her girlish graces. She romped through the scene.

Rosher moved his camera for a medium shot.

"Miss Murray, stop using your eyes. I want to see response on your face, I want a response from inside."

"I'm not dumb," she said earnestly. "If you'll explain."

He explained. The basic thing was to project what you *felt*. Surface projection was usually too much. It became ludicrous. "Tom Forman is an upper-class snob and a beau brummel, but he loves you. Try to understand him."

She asked the musicians to play something sad. Analysis was not her forte, emotion was. James Young saw that it worked and toward the end of the picture, he let her have music even during a scene. *Let* everyone laugh; but before *Sweet Kitty* was finished, almost every star on the lot was acting to music.

"If you would just keep in the light," Charlie Rosher told her confidentially. "Sometimes I lose you."

"I can't have two ideas in my mind at once. Why don't you have two lights, Charlie, then when I move away from one, the other can pick me up."

Oh *Kitty* was all right. Mae knew it when she saw the rushes. "A little bit of fluff from Follyland" they'd called her in a magazine. Wait until they saw this!

The minute the picture was finished, she started another, *The Dream Girl*, again a romantic novel but this time with DeMille directing. This was a triumph, one of the two best directors (Griffith was the other, of course) willing to bother with her. This time she'd play a waif named Meg whose only refuge from a brutal father was to hide in a barrel.

The drunken father was to be the noted character actor Theodore Roberts. In early scenes with him, she'd be tousled and winsome. In later scenes, beloved by a millionaire's grand-

son, she'd go to a fine school, wear sweet clothes and her hair in curls. To Mae it was a piquant character, spontaneous and innocent. She loved the transition from rags to riches. Why shouldn't Sir Gallahad be Meg's dream—he was *hers*.

DeMille was a martinet on the set, lashing everyone toward the perfectionism he strove for. Instead of a labored introduction to the action, he started the picture right off with each character showing his dominant traits, like the start of a good book. He himself jumped up to do a drunk scene, staggering about breaking chairs, smashing bottles the way he wanted Roberts to do it, while Mae cowered in the barrel with one side missing for the camera to peer in. DeMille was depending on Theodore Roberts for depth of performance; he left Mae to gaze appealingly into the blue eyes of leading man Earle Fox. She'd known Earle when he was with Jolson in *Dancing Around*, she'd danced with him at the Knickerbocker. He was a handsome, clean-cut fellow, the same type as Wally Reid but he lacked something Wally had, some hidden fire.

Back in New York, however, Jay didn't feel Earle lacked *anything* and every night he was on the phone threatening to come west and put an end to this screen romance. She couldn't risk that. She could imagine Jay rushing onto the set, punching Earle on his well-shaped nose. No one could stage more drama than Jay. She implored DeMille to let her go home. It was very important, a personal matter; and DeMille said fine, they were about to shoot *The Big Sister* in New York. Slum streets were needed as background, she could make the picture while she was there.

The script was given to her to read on the train. Again she would be a waif, surrounded by sordid characters on the dirty streets. Again she'd wear ugly ragged clothes. But it was an excuse to get to New York and once she got to New York, she'd just tell Mr. Zukor.

Mr. Zukor said the picture was ready to roll. They'd hired New York actors for the other roles but she was the only one to play Betty.

It was terribly hot. They shot in a perpetual crowd of perspiring people in the slums. The producer—his name was O'Brien too—wouldn't hear of her having musicians. Jay never left her alone. When would she marry him? When? How could she tell him *never*?

"Give me a little more time, Jay. Let me get straightened out with the studio."

She went to Zukor again. "I must have music. Don't you see, Mr. Zukor? Here we are out in the public street, I'm supposed to be playing scenes of emotional intensity in the midst of hundreds of gawking people. I'll *pay* for the music."

"We can't antagonize your director," Zukor said blandly.

"But you're always saying you want *me* to be happy. I don't see it. I don't see one considerate gesture."

They settled for a violin for the last part of the picture where "Nifty" the gangster has been giving Betty trouble and she prepares to leave town with her young brother. At the last moment, the boy runs into the street and is hit by a car, the millionaire's car of course. She must break through the crowd, and huddle over the body of the child. They rehearsed the scene several times. Now two cameras were being moved into the street for her close-up (the close-up first, before her face was tearstained). A megaphone was shouting orders to the crowd of extras. Extras dressed as policemen were holding them back. Hundreds of curious onlookers milled around and real policemen tried to hold *them* back.

Mae stood close to the building, the violinist beside her, wilting in the humid heat. "Please play the 'Ave Maria,'" she told him and he played, very tenderly, the bow drawing out the Ah-h-h-h-h-h. A make-up man pressed a blotter to her brow, to each side of her nose.

"That's enough! Don't play another note, I'm ready." She had to hold back the tears.

"People in the crowd, keep your eyes on the boy's body. You're *horrified*. Murmur to each other. Don't look around. Look at the *boy*. Action. *Camera!*" O'Brien's voice boomed

hollowly through the megaphone. "OK, Mae! Let her through, people. Damn it, let her *through!*"

She pushed against the damp soiled people, feeling hot light from the reflectors, keeping the "Ave Maria" in her loud as a boys' choir. There he was, her little brother. She clasped the limp body, looked up to the camera and now let the tears fill her eyes, spill over, streak her face.

"Fade out. *Cut!* Print. Now the long shot."

She did it again. The minute he said, "All for today." she jumped into a taxi and hurried to her hotel. The tip she handed the cabbie was equivalent to the fare. He stared in astonishment at the shabbily dressed girl, her face streaked with tears and grime. Mae rushed up to her room for a cold shower.

The next day she and Rudy di Valentina went to Manhasset to swim, out at the Castles' place. Vernon was in Europe. He had joined the Royal Flying Corps in England and was risking his life fighting German planes. How strange it seemed. Of course he'd been obsessed with the war even during *Watch Your Step*; he'd wanted to be in then and only humored Irene by postponing it a while; but here on the gay beach it was difficult to imagine the drone of a plane, the blast of bombs.

She wore a red ruffled suit and floated about in the water, feeling cool and refreshed. Rudy swam out and yanked off his jersey for more freedom. He came from the surf glistening, looking more muscular, healthier than she'd ever seen him; and it wasn't just that he was making a hundred a week dancing with Bonnie at the Montmarte. Rudy was in love. With Blanca deSaulles! The little ivory figurine had taken Mae's advice and gone dancing; that's how they'd met. Now Rudy was keeping his eyes open, watching Jack deSaulles. Jack knew nothing about him; perhaps he could help Blanca get enough evidence to win a divorce.

"I'm not just the benevolent friend," Rudy admitted. "I want to marry her, Murray. I worship Blanca and she needs me."

Mae could have wept now without the "Ave Maria." How like Rudy to care for someone wounded. And what could ever become of them? Her one encounter with Blanca had left her feeling the girl was spiritually bankrupt. Rudy wanted a home and children; what did Blanca want?

"Rudy," she said, "isn't it strange? You want so to have love and I am trying so to run away from it."

The question for Mae was where to run. Certainly not back to California. She didn't even go to see Mr. Zukor once *The Big Sister* was finished. She went roller-skating with her friends from the *Follies*, and went dancing every night. When they told her Olive Thomas had gone out to California, she felt sorry for Olive; she wished she could have warned her.

One night when she and Jay were dining at a restaurant, James Montgomery Flagg sat at the next table, sketching her. That was the night she met Mabel Normand. Brown satin eyes and brown satin hat, Mabel came over to the table and introduced herself; she'd just come from the coast.

"Everyone's talking about *you*," she laughed; "you've really stirred them up, Mae."

"I don't think anyone likes me."

"They probably don't. I certainly know one lady with golden curls who hates your insides."

Mae looked puzzled. She had completely forgotten the "Merry Pickum" number.

"After all, you did play her to a fare thee well in the *Follies*. Well, what I wanted to say is this, just stand on your own two feet. You're Irish, you can take it."

"I don't like Hollywood. I'm not going back."

Mabel nodded. "I know. I've said that often myself." She smiled and shook hands warmly.

Mr. Zukor phoned the next day. They were calling him from the coast. Where in the world was Mae Murray? She explained to Mr. Zukor that she was not going back, that it was not what he had promised at all. They had treated her abominably. He asked her to come to the office.

"I thought you were ambitious," he said in his gentle voice, a disappointed father.

"I am but I want to be happy too. Look how good I was in the Ziegfeld *Follies*. I was happy then. No one was shooting guns to make me jump. You don't *have* to be miserable to be great. I don't believe it."

"What would it take to make you happy?"

"I can't go back, Mr. Zukor." She burst into tears. "I hate Hollywood! I can't face it again—I can't!" He tried to reason with her.

"Mae, *Sweet Kitty* is doing excellent business, *The Dream Girl* is doing excellent business. The critics are raving about you and the public loves you. Besides, don't you understand, you have a *three-year* contract."

She didn't want to talk about contracts, she knew nothing about contracts.

"I'd need to have Jenny with me," she wailed. "She cooks for me and pets me."

He nodded.

"I have to have someone there I know."

"You may have Jenny. We'll send her along."

"I don't want any more dramatic directors. All this raving and ranting! I like to be gay," she sobbed. "I want someone who knows something about musical comedy."

"Hm. That's a little more difficult, but I think..."

"I'd need a lot more money," she cried.

Zukor laughed. He positively laughed. "What is it you're making now, nine hundred? I told you in the beginning, you have a great potential. The first three pictures have established you and we can afford to raise the ante. Come now, dear. Be a big person. Justify my faith in you. Go back to work."

She dried her eyes. "You'll find me a director who'll understand me? I would like more close-ups."

Mr. Zukor sighed, he remembered when actors had been of such slight importance the audience didn't even know their names. "I have a fine director in mind, if we can buy him

away from Universal. He's been in musical comedy, he's acted and directed . . . Dear," he told his secretary, "get me Robert Z. Leonard at Universal Studio."

She left for California the next day. There was no use telling Jay good-by. She just left; and this time she was determined to succeed, to make it her world.

6



Bob Leonard was a big man with glowing red-gold hair swept smooth across his head, reddish eyebrows and thoughtful eyes. What she saw in them from the first was herself, a tiny image reflected in calm pale-blue eyes. The moment she entered his office he rose, came forward to greet her, and took her hand in his. She liked his air of vitality and warm friendliness.

"I've run and re-run your pictures every night this week. What an exciting future you have."

His confidence was contagious. "I think so too," she said. "I've always thought of success as a package waiting for me at the post office."

He led her to a chair. "You've read the script of *The Plow Girl*?"

"I don't want to read it. I'd like you to tell me about it, Mr. Leonard. I want to know how it is through *you*."

He considered that thoughtfully. "Good. Well then, this is the story of a South African child named Margot. Virtuous, determined, innocent. She's dragged off to slavery by the drunken farmer who killed her parents. Theodore Roberts will

play Varley. I don't have to tell you what a powerful brute he can be; you had a hint of it in *The Dream Girl*. But this time he'll be no bumbling boozier, he'll be a vicious man who carries a horsewhip and uses it, who's willing to sell you to the local bartender for the price of his rum bill. Elliott Dexter is my choice for the young lawyer. Did you see him in *The Heart of Nora Flynn* or in *Diplomacy* with Marie Doro?"

She hadn't, but Dexter was a reasonable choice, no great actor but a "clean-cut American type." He'd had stage experience, he had the physical strength to cope with Robert's Varley.

"The lawyer and the grandmother come to Africa searching for the child who is to inherit the grandmother's fortune. They find you virtually Varley's slave. I've been working with scenarist Charles Sarver; he's preparing our screen play from the story by Morris. We would like to establish the character of this girl in an early scene where she comes across the field in her rags, carrying a water jar..."

"But she's dreaming of something else, isn't she?" and jumping to her feet, Mae ran across the office, lifted a large dictionary to her shoulder and approached him like a mannequin, not a ragged girl, but a mannequin bearing a Grecian urn.

"That's it! Good! Inside of you, you're *not* wearing rags."

"In the world but not of it," she said, smiling because she sensed that she could work with him. He'd be a mirror, not a hammer, a mirror as Ziegfeld had been, only closer somehow; she sensed that from the way he looked at her.

"Our first big scene is out in the field where the brute is whipping you. Lady Brentwood and the lawyer arrive, the young lawyer rushes to your rescue, seizes the whip and turns the tables on Varley, lashing him into the blades of the threshing machine. Then he takes you to your grandmother. The elegant lonely old woman, the lonely child. Can you imagine the scene where you are dressed finally in your dear mother's dress?"

She would touch the fabric to be sure it was more than a dream.

"You kneel at the old lady's feet, she enfolds you. Come," he raised her carefully, standing her with her back to the window where sunlight dressed her promptly in cloak and hood. "We'll put a light behind you. Good Lord, you can look ethereal! It'll be a scene to hit the heart."

This is the man, she thought.

"We can make a great picture, Mae. Trust me."

She gave him her hands. "You're the first one in this business who understands. I *am* an actress, but not of their school. I have to express things my way."

"You don't have to tell me. Everything's in your face."

"I'll work hard, Mr. Leonard. I adore perfection. I'll do a scene a dozen times until it's right. I don't believe the way some people do—get it done and get it fast."

He didn't laugh. "It's going to be right, don't worry. I've done enough acting myself, I don't direct on the cuff. It isn't fair to the actors or to anyone else. I work with my story writer, I plan the continuity, we rehearse and while we rehearse the cameraman gets his instructions for difficult scenes. I use several cameramen to work with me. We'll talk over the script before we start and every day as we go along. Make suggestions. You are creative, *be* creative."

Mae felt exhilarated by their first meeting, and more hopeful than she ever had in Hollywood. At last, someone would really be working with and for her—someone who knew what he was doing. Robert Z. Leonard had served his apprenticeship in comic opera and on the stage. A graduate of the University of Colorado, he'd been a prop man in Denver theatres, then a stage manager, comedian and singer. He'd sung in more than a hundred light operas with the Colorado Opera Company before he'd come out to Hollywood to work for Bill Selig, the first man to build a motion-picture set on the west coast. He'd played such strenuous leads as those in *The Code of Honor*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Forest Primeval*, and survived the hazards of a serial, *The Master Key*, before he turned to directing. The director was the pivot, the key figure in motion-

picture production, as Leonard envisaged him. Like Ince and Sennett and other top directors, he chose the story, worked on the writing, and supervised editing.

He found Mae provocative and exciting. From the moment he met her he felt as Griffith had felt with Pickford and Gish. He had something tangible to work with, a star. He took her with him to see the daily rushes. He took her to dinner. They sat for hours over a red-checked tablecloth at a little inn in the mountains talking of the girl they'd just scrutinized on the screen. He was as enchanted as she was with the shadow creature who emerged on film with her soulful, childlike eyes and wistful charm.

On the set all was cordiality and calm. Bob directed in a soft, steady voice. He sat in his cross-legged chair, close to his players, as if they were all on a stage chatting. He put his cast completely at ease and treated Mae—yes, there was no question about it, he treated her with adoration. The director's attitude set the tone for everyone on the set. Oh, it was simple now that she understood it. She had been forced on Melford and Young and O'Brien. They'd wanted a star and instead had been given an unknown dancer; but Bob Leonard wanted *her*, he'd been hired *for* her.

They shot the flogging scene. Theodore Roberts raised his whip, there was a close-up of her cowering, an action shot of the whip, then a close-up of her, clothes torn, the tears welling. She hovered near the director's chair.

"Would I be stepping on your toes," she asked, "if I asked you to shoot this scene again and don't cut until I say so?"

When they saw it in the projection room Bob Leonard said, "That's how a close-up should be developed, how Griffith does it. We're good partners, Mae." He never told her not to emote in the long shots. He knew she was a dancer, and movement was essential in expressing her emotions.

Outdoor sequences were shot at Lake Tahoe; they stayed at the hotel and rode horseback to their location. The first day, she rode out in the plowgirl's loose trousers and an old checked

shirt. It was magnificent country, sunlight filtering through the trees stroked their heads, wind stroked their faces.

"The sheep are gentle. I'll show you how to hold the 'injured' one."

"I like animals, Bob, I'm not afraid. I'll probably want to take one home with me."

"We've made arrangements with several flock masters, good hardy men. They'll help you round them up. You'll like them and they'll worship you. We'll probably shoot late this afternoon, I want light slanting at this angle to catch you as you tend the flock."

She thanked God for the father, friend and champion He had sent her. She rode beside him through the bracing air, conscious of his size and strength, feeling more cared for and watched over than ever before in her life.

Her musings were so absorbing she didn't realize she was blistering her thighs in the saddle. Bob had to lift her from the horse. He placed her on a blanket under a shade tree, blamed himself for carelessness; a man was dispatched to the hotel for ointment and tight underwear for the ride home. Did she feel well enough to work? Yes, she assured him, she'd work, no matter what. And it was a lovely scene that day. She knelt among the sheep at sundown, holding the injured one while golden light dappled her golden hair and shafts of sunlight striped the hills.

Evenings they rowed on Lake Tahoe. They visited Donner Lake too, he told her of the ill-fated expedition that once wintered here and was reduced to cannibalism. But mostly they talked about their picture and other pictures they would make together—she had already phoned Mr. Zukor to ask that Bob continue to direct her. The question was: What did the public want? What could they do better than anything now being done? Bob said the industry suffered from over-production... "each producer's desire to be first and foremost in the projection room." The result? "Worthless plots," he

said, "mechanical acting, dull direction, scenic sameness. You don't know, Mae. I want you to start seeing pictures."

"But I'm not interested in what others do. I study my own pictures. I sneak into theatres and watch them over and over, see what *they* see."

"You should know what's going on. Motion pictures can be a great art but the art end of the industry is in a crisis. What's happened? Patronage has mounted at the box office, the public is clamoring for films, yet three companies went out of business this year and those left are turning out more trash than art. The industry has to decide—mass production or better pictures better produced. We're lucky with Lasky and Zukor. They're willing to spend money and get dimension. This location, for example. You, for example."

A good deal of what he said about the industry was vague to her; so far as she was concerned, all that mattered was what they did together.

"You know all about business, Bob. You do the thinking, I'll do the feeling."

He laughed and accepted the division of labor. They felt very close after the days at Tahoe, the long ride down on the train. He drove her home from the station as a matter of course.

The phone was ringing when they walked in, and Jenny was wild; New York had been calling for two days.

Bob Leonard turned to go.

"Stay, I'll just be a moment, Bob. Let Jenny make us some hot coffee."

But she trembled when she heard Jay's terse voice on the phone. She could just see his face and the twitching jaw muscle.

"In Allah's name, what game are we playing? You left without saying good-by. You don't answer letters or flowers."

"I've been busy. Terribly busy and..."

"With that red-headed director?"

"Jay, he's been very kind."

"*Very kind*," he mimicked. "*He understands me*. Cut the bull, Mae. Tell that guy whom you belong to before *I* come out and tell him. Baby..."

She put the receiver down as if it were lead.

"Anything I can do?" Bob said softly.

"Yes, let me tell you." And she told him all about Jay O'Brien, everything she could remember. He listened intently, nodding as she talked, or sometimes shaking his head.

"Sounds like bad melodrama," he said, trying to make her smile. "I don't think our studio'd buy it. Do you love him, Mae?"

"No, no. I never did. He's exciting. I was fascinated at first because I was just a kid..." A year and a half ago—it seemed centuries. "But once away from him... I haven't thought of Jay since I left New York!" Her hands doubled into fists. "I don't know what to do, Bob. Tell me what to do."

"Marry me," he said simply. "I haven't asked you only because I'm still not free. When my divorce is final... Mae, I've loved you from the moment you walked into my office, when you picked up that imaginary pail and became my plowgirl."

He didn't touch her. No lunging, no panting, no hot hands, he just sat looking at her with his steady blue gaze. She liked that. She loved adoration, a man who would kneel at her feet and kiss her hand. Where in any fairy tale did the man seize the princess and mash his mouth on hers? The whole idea was repulsive to Mae and yet men were constantly attracted to her *this way*. Here at last was a man who, whatever he felt, could control himself.

"I think it would be a beautiful arrangement, Bob, oh yes!" she said and promptly put Jay O'Brien out of her mind. Forever.

The next day she received a pet monkey—hadn't she said once she'd adore a monkey?—she sent it back to the shop; then came a bracelet of blue sapphires. She didn't wear it.

With Bob, she worked day and night cutting, editing, titling,

tinting *The Plow Girl*. He did everything himself and he did nothing without her. In the projection room they discussed in minute detail how to assemble close, medium and long shots. Bob was expert; he trusted no one else to touch "our" picture. Meanwhile he was preparing a shooting script for *The Mormon Maid* from the story by Paul West.

This story she didn't like; it was too stark with its constant confusion and sorrow, the white-hooded Mormon angels forcing other people to their way of life. Bob explained that they must make the picture, the studio was committed to it. But he pointed out that in the early scenes she'd have a chance to be delightfully tomboyish and that later, with her family endangered, she'd have a chance to show more genuine dramatic power than in any picture so far. He was writing the script himself to be sure the emphasis was right.

They shot *The Mormon Maid* mostly at night at the Lasky Ranch, the air so cold she scarcely dared breathe for fear of fogging on camera. Bob had the brush beaten every night for snakes, then white-hooded angels went tearing across country and she with them. Several times she had to be switched from one horse to another going full gallop. Bob would have gotten her a double but she said no, no boy with a blonde wig would look like her and she *wasn't* frightened. Not of anything. When they filmed the Indian raid, the only convenient tree for her to climb was the skinniest little elm imaginable. They drove in cleats and up she went, not noticing how absurdly thin it was until they saw the rushes. There was the girl, in boots and skin dress, perched like a flower in a tree no thicker than a stem. But at the time she'd been marveling at Bob on his high platform, directing the "Indians." He handled a hundred elements, blending them like a good choreographer. And like a good choreographer he appreciated her gestures, the way when, weary, she became limp, or, holding her lover in a moment of anguish, put her arms about him with her small fists doubled. He kept his eye on her, she knew that he saw everything.

When they shot on the set, reporters and photographers were

there constantly. One young man from *Photoplay Magazine* asked all kinds of questions. Where was she born? Where were her parents? How did she get started in show business?

"My father was a sea captain. I was born on his boat. I spent my childhood in Europe," she told him; but he pressed for more and she explained that her father, the sea captain, had passed away when she was five, her mother lived in Europe, she had been raised by her great-grandmother who was very strict and didn't believe in the theatre and placed her in convents. "I ran away, always. Once I heard music in the streets of Paris and I followed it, broke from the other children and followed the music all the way to the Sacre Coeur. I took off my shoes and danced to the band until it was dark. Then I told the gendarmes I was lost and which my convent was and they took me back."

She made a little motion with her hands as if that's all there was to it. At that moment she caught Bob Leonard's amused glance. He'd heard, he was listening now to the puzzled reporter.

"Golly. I have a bio on you that says nothing like that. Weren't you born in Virginia? Marie Adrienne Koenig, Portsmouth?"

She looked at the reporter blankly, as if he couldn't be talking about the same girl. "I was born on my father's boat whilst we were at sea," she repeated slowly, quietly. "I've never had any name save my own, Mae Murray."

"Golly, I'm sorry, but here it says..." He was red-faced. "And about romance, do you plan, I mean are you planning, I mean have you ever..."

"You would have to scramble yourself up in impertinences you didn't mean. Now, what shall we talk about? Cats? I adore cats. When I was in the Ziegfeld *Follies* I had five. Now I just have Silver Sam."

"What can I say?"

"Say that the study of cats has been most helpful in giving me ideas for dancing and acting. Cats are endowed with a per-

fect sense of pantomime, they are truly expressive. I sometimes go to the Bronx Zoo and study tiger families."

"Thank you," mumbled the flustered young man, retreating.

Bob Leonard was in stitches. "Where did you learn it all?"

"What?"

"I've seen seasoned stars from New York fall all over themselves at fan interviews. By the way, what did your father really do, Mae?"

She faced him as blankly as she had the young reporter. "He was a sea captain and I was born whilst my father's boat was at sea."

The next day she had to take another reporter driving in her new red Thunderbolt. More publicity. She wore knickerbockers and a tam and drove rapidly along Vine Street and up Hollywood Boulevard, while the reporter held on to his cap with one hand and tried to take notes with the other. She gave him her full attention, and it seemed to drive him crazy.

"Watch the *road!*" he yelled, startling her so she drove up on the sidewalk. He pushed the rakish little car back over the curb but at the next intersection she spotted a stray dog crossing and ran straight into a tree, slowly.

"My *God*," the reporter said. "This is the only fox-trotting automobile in captivity. Tell me, before anything more happens, let's just sit here and tell me, what do you think of Hollywood?"

"I believe in being in the world but not of it."

He went away in a state of shock.

That night Bob took her dancing. They went out to Baron Long's, stopped for a drink at the Vernon Country Club and then went on to the Ship Cafe at the pier. Everyone was beautifully dressed, dazzling with jewels.

"Why, it's like New York!"

"It's like *Hollywood*," Bob laughed, pointing out Jack Pickford, Doug Fairbanks, Anita Loos the writer, as they whirled about the floor. He danced well. He liked gaiety.

"I do too," she said, tilting her head back. "This is what I

love, Bob, every night; this is stimulation, this is life. To work hard, rush into a shower, dress, spray yourself with fragrance and emerge into the night like a *star*."

Her candor delighted him. He ordered champagne *brut* and over the table raised his glass and a newspaper clipping—he wanted her to read a review of *The Plow Girl*.

"I don't read reviews, Bob."

"Let me read at least one line: 'Mae Murray would thrill you in five reels of the Constitution of the United States!' I'm going to give that to Lasky to use in advertising. They say nice things about me too." He bit his underlip and threw the clipping on the table where she could read it or not. "Let's dance, dear."

She'd never been this happy in her life. A top director in love with her, they were dancing, they would work and dance and conquer the world, no stopping them! Now he'd chosen a new script she loved, Ruth Sawyer's fairy story, *The Primrose Ring*. Marian Fairfax was preparing the screen play and she was working with Marian.

As a student nurse saving a crippled baby, she is hurt and in delirium lives in the world of the White Knight she's created for the children. Bob spent loving care rehearsing the scene where she comes downstairs after the accident, the black-stockinged legs coming slowly, moving first only in faith, then gaining strength. Oh! she did believe, anything was possible with faith.

"Miss Murray. Pardon me. It's important," the studio messenger said.

She clung to the bannister, thinking of the White Knight.

"Miss Murray. Mr. Lasky's secretary says..."

Bob put his hand on her arm. "Mae, you're wanted in your dressing room. It's almost time for our lunch break. You go, dear. You've got the scene. We'll shoot it after lunch." He kissed her limp hand.

"Bob, she's a Peter Pan character, isn't she? Bigger inside than outside."

"Like someone else I know."

"When we go out to Boyle Heights to the orphanage tomorrow, I want really to tell the children stories. You'll be able to see by their faces."

"When you tell them the story of the dog, the child *will* see the dog. We'll have fairy-tale sequences all the way through, your White Knight included."

"Thank you," she said.

"Miss Murray?"

"Phone, tell them I'm coming." And she ran off, across the lot in her black demure stockings and little black shoes, still half in the world of *The Primrose Ring* until her dressing door opened and Jay confronted her. He was in an ugly mood, he had come to "kill that red-headed bastard," it was all she could do to get him away quietly; and then only by agreeing to meet him later for dinner with some friends and talk things over.

The shiny black car was waiting at the gate when she came out, her red umbrella tilted against a fine drizzle. The sides of the car were open but Jay had just finished fastening the top. He introduced a flashy, stocky little man, Pud Sickles, who took her umbrella while Jay helped her in.

"We'll pick up Mrs. Sickles in Pasadena," Jay said and drove rapidly across town. It wasn't at all what she'd expected. Instead of making caustic comments and accusations, Jay ignored her; both men seemed to forget that she was there. Pud Sickles talked about football and Yale and Army. Jay talked of Princeton and Columbia and kept his far-sighted eyes on the wet road. Poor Bob had begged her not to go; but here she was in the back seat and perfectly all right. They were still talking about horses and polo and tipsters, when they swung into a driveway with a terrible screech of brakes.

It was a big, square white house—the Sickles', she supposed. Jay opened the door, helped her out, hurried her up the stairs and through the door. Mrs. Sickles was not to be seen. Neither was Pud. She and Jay walked into a large, rather dull room with a maroon-colored carpet worn thin over near the desk.

He was still holding her arm. She tried to draw away and his grip tightened.

He was gazing down at her with a rapt look as if he would eat her. "You'll never get away from me again," he muttered.

"Jay, I'll go wherever I wish, whenever..."

He jerked her to him, an iron rod bruised her side.

"That's a gun, baby, feel it?"

And at this moment, the judge walked in with Pud Sickles. He was a dissipated-looking man with shabby gray hair and a weary gray face, but he smiled at her, at least he twitched his mouth to the side.

"Jay O'Brien," Sickles said, "and the future Mrs. O'Brien."

"Welcome to heaven," said the judge wryly. "At least they say that's where marriages are made and we're about to..."

He couldn't finish it.

"License?" he said.

Sickles produced it.

"Ring?"

Sickles produced it, smiling broadly.

Jay continued to hold her pressed against the gun. The judge spoke. Fear dulled her senses like an anesthetic. This was worse than being tossed from one galloping Mormon horse to another. Riding through the night, she had still known that the bullets weren't real, the director would eventually yell "*Cut!*", he'd come and lift her gently from the horse and feed her hot chocolate and chaff her cold hands. Oh Bob! I'll find a way out, there must be a way.

It wasn't surprising that the scene confused her. It was like a script that was being written as they went along. She didn't know what might be coming next. Jay was just mad enough to kill her if she tried to get away; but worse, he could unloose a barrage of ugly publicity which was the last thing she'd want at this stage of her career. She hadn't climbed, worked, dreamed and played dangerous scenes without a double to be stopped now. And of course, mixed with fear was an element of total surprise. She didn't believe it was really happening, even when

the ring slid onto her finger and Jay's mouth pressed hers. This must be a wild practical joke. In another moment Jay would let on and they'd all laugh at her consternation.

Sickles joked with the judge and the judge gave her a limp handshake. "Congratulations, Mrs. O'Brien." Jay steered her back to the car, and they swept through the night without a word. He took the gun from his pocket and shot into the sky. They stopped somewhere and Pud brought Mrs. Sickles out of the dark and introduced her to "Mrs. O'Brien." The nightmare went on to the Alexandria Hotel, to a dinner of squab and champagne, all nauseously real.

She climbed out of the ladies'-room window, found a taxi and gave the driver the studio address. Suddenly, she became aware of Jay's little finger ring glittering on her hand. She took it off and threw it into the street. What in the world would Bob be thinking? He'd begged her not to go, he loved her, he wanted to marry her.

The studio cop waved her through and she saw the light in Bob's office. He had been pacing up and down, he stood now the color of stone, watching her run in. She clung to him like a child, screaming, like a child.

"Bob, I couldn't help it. I'm married."

7



The March, 1918, issue of *Photoplay Magazine* announced the marriage

...of Mae Murray of Follies fame, pouty lips and Paramount pix to Jay O'Brien, civilian luminary of the Great White Way, known to all the traffic cops, first nights etc., at Lasky Studio Hollywood, honeymoon in the direction of the San Bernardino Mountains where exteriors are being shot for "The Primrose Ring."

The account failed to mention that at midnight the same night, Mae Murray and a distraught Bob Leonard visited the judge's home in Pasadena. The drizzle had turned into a downpour now, Bob held her in the shelter of his topcoat while they waited on the front porch for the judge to answer his bell. Bob's thumbnail widened white against the buzzer. They could hear the faint echo of chimes sounding inside, almost drowned by the swish and splatter of rain. It seemed a long time before the door opened and the shabby gray head appeared, even shabbier above the satin brocaded bathrobe, and surly now at being awakened.

"Robert Z. Leonard of Paramount Studios, your honor. Miss Mae Murray. May we have a word?"

He led them into his study, switched on the lights and recognized her. "Oh yes, Mrs. O'Bri..."

"Don't say it," she implored him. "That name isn't mine, that ceremony was a total farce, he had a gun pressed against my side. He's threatened to kill me, to kill Mr. Leonard, to ruin us both with vile publicity. Please understand, it wasn't a real marriage!"

"Let me assure you it was a very real marriage. You should have spoken up before."

"Miss Murray is one of our outstanding young stars," Bob said. "She has a reputation of which she can be proud and this man was threatening her with virtual blackmail."

The judge glared.

"Please help us. Erase it from the records," she pleaded.

"The help you need is from a lawyer," he said crisply. "Someone who'll handle Hollywood shenanigans! If you can prove the marriage was never consummated you might wangle an annulment."

Bob put his arm about her quickly, and took her away from such stupidity. He phoned his lawyer from the first telephone booth. The lawyer explained that Jay would have to corroborate her testimony. He didn't know the arrogant Jay, who would stop at nothing to get—and keep—what he wanted.

They drove around and around in the loose wet night. There was no question of her going home; it wasn't safe. There would be no safety anywhere without protection; to achieve that, the studio must be called in.

DeMille had her installed at the studio in her own dressing room with an armed police guard at her door. That's where she spent the honeymoon.

As for the San Bernardino Mountains, they rose purple, majestic, invulnerable in the background, while Jay O'Brien paced the platform and the train belched and puffed smoke. He'd told the studio representative he'd go back east only if

Mae would come and say good-by. Two plain-clothesmen accompanied her this time, trailing a few steps behind her as she approached the platform.

"Jay."

"Well, Mrs. O'Brien," he said, casually, offering his hand.

Into it she put a small package of jewels. "I want you to have these back," she said softly. "Good-by, Jay."

"You'll never forgive yourself, glamour lady." His mocking smile told her how useless it would be to mention annulment. "I offered you a real life. Unfortunately you prefer to borrow every least gesture from the boards and always the most obvious clichés. Even those trinkets... Ophelia isn't it? Act III, Scene One?"

Who was this misguided reckless man to talk of dramatics? He followed every whim as if wishes were horses and his stable of racers could carry him around the world. Without purpose, ambition or dedication—to anything but himself—how *could* he understand what motivated her?

The train carried him off across the mountains and she went back to the White Knight of *The Primrose Ring*. Bob's lawyer made overtures but Jay scoffed at them. Marriage not *consummated*? Divorce proceedings got under way. None of it had the least reality. What was real were the moments when the cameras turned and she was before them.

Mae counted on Bob Leonard's understanding. Actually, to him too Mae was the epitome of glamour, the sexiest woman he'd ever met, and the fact that she didn't know it only made her the more attractive. Jay had frightened her by wild pursuit. Bob had no intention of committing the same error. He would bide his time. Once they were married it would be possible to awaken her to her own promise. In the meanwhile, and he cursed the *meanwhile*, obliterated it with a quick jolt of brandy—there was work to be done. Mae's box office was climbing, so was their skill. They were developing a style, each picture was better unified, the long hours they put in preparing a film were paying off. He was able to create an atmosphere for her,

a mood in photography and script against which her personality bloomed. It was a different personality from any on the screen, there was a wistful childish quality but there was gaiety and provocation.

After completing *The Primrose Ring*, which Bob considered the best thing she'd done, they studied *At First Sight*, a comedy romance in which she'd escape from the polished ingrate who schemes to marry her for her money to the novelist whose romantic heroes have been her ideals. Mae wanted to emphasize the comic elements in it. Comedy added to drama, she felt, could display her best assets and make her a great star.

They were working so hard that one day when Bob ordered a pile of pillows removed from the set, the prop men found Mae fast asleep in the middle of the pile. The square of cel-luloid, with its germ of life that could be projected into larger than life-size living, fascinated her. She was giving it everything she had; before her always were her idols, Rachel, Bernhardt, Duse. They had become immortal because they *felt*. How could you project what you did not *feel*? To spare her energy, Bob had the boys make a dummy exactly her size, with her golden hair, to stand for lighting effect and camera angles.

Her salary was up to \$1200 a week now. Mr. Zukor hadn't been joking. One day she went downtown and put several pay-checks in the bank—which bank she promptly forgot—but it seemed the beginning of a fortune. Perhaps someday she'd have a company of her own. Actors were the magic, the golden eggs. Why should they be used by men who knew only business?

Mae wanted costly pictures from the first. She insisted on rich detail so that audiences that wanted to escape reality, the humdrum pattern of their own lives, would believe that these screen characters lived in an aura of real wealth and luxury, not just in papier-mâché settings. Mabel Normand's *Mickey* was said to have cost \$300,000. Chaplin's *Easy Street*, two reels, cost \$150,000. When she read figures like this, it seemed absurd

to struggle for perfection on a budget of \$50,000. Yet, they struggled.

Rehearsing *At First Sight*, no detail was too minute. Bob slaved over George Middleton's screen story. Mae thought it overburdened with plot and added some comic touches to the scene where the constable charges her reluctant lover with abduction. Bob rehearsed each member of the cast. Mae spent hours in wardrobe experimenting with costume. She was trying the effect of an enormous straw hat tied under the chin for the poor little rich girl when a call came from New York.

"You don't know me but I've been unable to reach Bob Leonard and I want to tell you they've recut *The Primrose Ring* here in New York."

"Recut? After all Bob's care?"

"They've cut the fairy scenes for one thing."

"Oh thank you. Bless you and thank you."

"You're my very favorite actress, Miss Murray."

She hung up the receiver gently, as if someone were ill, took off the straw hat, put on her own and ran across the lot to the cashier's office.

"May I have five hundred dollars? Immediately please."

The minute the money was in her hand, she rushed into the street, found a taxi, drove to the railroad station and caught a train. "No, no baggage, porter." Holed up in her small compartment, she began reviewing every bit of the picture. It wasn't until they passed Denver that she remembered Bob.

THEY HAVE DESTROYED OUR PICTURE. EN ROUTE TO SAVE IT IF I CAN. YOU MUST INSIST THAT NO ONE CUT OUR PICTURES, she wired.

In New York Mr. Zukor was summoned from a conference and pressed into coming with her at once to see the film. She was totally impassioned, the world had narrowed for her to the dimensions of this picture. At each cut, she winced as if physically hurt. When the picture was over, she was crying.

"Mr. Zukor, what can we do? All the best is gone. The plot hinges on the visible fairy tales; Mr. Leonard handled it with

such skill." And the little black legs had been cut too, coming slowly down the stairs.

Mr. Zukor sighed and dismissed the possibility of argument. "It shouldn't be impossible to find the cut-outs. You go to the cutting room, I'll phone and tell them you're coming."

"I'll need a magnifying glass," for each little square of celluloid they'd dared to cut. "Oh, and Mr. Zukor, I'll need a change of clothes."

He looked at her without understanding.

"I heard about the cuts and ran right out of the studio."

"Across the continent without luggage, little movie star?"

She smiled. It was the tantalizing smile that not in the least resembled other ingénues'. Next day Zukor sent his secretary out to buy some clothing. "A change for Miss Murray," he said.

"The question is, will she ever have *time* to change?" laughed the secretary. For it became legend that Mae was spending day and night in the dark barn of a warehouse going through the waste barrels, finding her lost cuts, a foot here, a yard there. She had them patched into the film. After three days' work Mr. Zukor was shown the complete version. Then she went to a hotel and changed.

So long as she was in town, her next picture might as well be shot here, Mr. Zukor said, so he wired Bob to come on. He himself was just leaving for Europe, his brother-in-law would see that they were kept comfortable and happy. But she and Bob discovered from the first that Zukor's brother-in-law was a difficult man, officious and not in the least creative. The climax came the day Mae went to the dressmakers' for a fitting of her "wedding dress." She had ordered it of flesh-colored satin with a gossamer veil of flesh-colored tulle. For the fitting, they brought in heavy ecru veiling and a dirty off-white gown. This would photograph white, brother-in-law had told the dressmaker. But how could you dress a fragile heiress in these ugly things? She reordered her original gossamer and satin and marched straight to brother-in-law's office with the ecru over her arm.

"I'd rather leave the studio than wear this."

"If you're such a Tartar, by all means," he retorted.

She and Bob resigned that day, as of the finish of the picture. The company lawyer begged them to wait for Zukor's return, but they'd talked it all over and agreed it was time to make a change.

"We must have our own unit," Bob said. "We work well together, we want freedom, we'll be married as soon as your divorce is final. We should have our own unit."

They switched to Universal and began a series under the Bluebird label. *Princess Virtue...Face Value*—she and Bob wrote that one themselves...*The Bride's Awakening*, what had just come to be called a "gray" picture, barely skirting tragedy with a happy ending...*Her Body in Bond...Danger Go Slow*, they wrote this too and found captivating possibilities in dressing Mae as a boy...*Modern Love...The Scarlet Shadow*. They had virtually eliminated captions—captions weren't necessary if you worked in pantomime and had a script developed with logical continuity. And this Bob had. After they accepted a story, they'd write the script, indicating as they went: the long shots, the medium-long, medium, close-up, angle shots, and so forth. For important sequences Bob used as many as four cameras. Dramatic scenes were given a rose or sepia tint. They worked right along with the artist who was doing the titles. Above all, every sequence had at least a week's rehearsal before a foot of film was shot.

For *Her Body in Bond* she persuaded Bob to let her do a prologue in pantomime, a highly stylized dance against a cloudy background which would set the mood for the picture. Kenneth Harlan played Pierrot to her Pierrette, Al Roscoe was Harlequin. This prologue pleased her more than anything she had ever done, a step farther into the art of make-believe.

Until now, they had gone to great lengths, Mae and Bob, to be sure each of her characterizations was different. No matter how flimsy the story, character impact must be strong. That they'd succeeded in establishing an actress with individuality

was borne out by critical acclaim, by her growing box office and by her salary (\$1750 now). But Bob worried that the public might not accept anything as imaginative as this impressionistic prologue.

"What you're trying to convey is the very essence of acting."

"Yes," she agreed, "the dream I've always half-lived. I've always felt that my life touches another dimension. You know that, Bob."

So she had her way and he watched fascinated as she danced, ten feet away from him in another world, interpretative and sensuous, as if she would give herself to Pierrot before his eyes.

Several prologues later, they were married. They left the set of *What Am I Bid?*, slipped past the one-sheets advertising Mae as the *Girl For Sale* in this picture, were married at the house of a Hollywood justice, and went on to dinner as usual. Bob moved quietly into the house on Franklin Avenue and life continued to the steady treadmill of production. With one difference. Free of her former ties, legally Bob's wife, Mae could leave the studio behind at night and emerge with him into a milieu as glamorous as any they pictured on film.

They met Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Gish at the opening of a new winery. At a party in Long Beach, Charlie Chaplin disappeared into the Hellmans' kitchen, came back with a tablecloth and spittoon and held them spellbound with his performance of Salome. Olive Thomas had married Jack Pickford and they looked beautiful together at the Ship Cafe, or Baron Long's or at the Cotton Club. They'd run into Gloria Swanson with her husband H. K. Somborn, Milton Sills and Doris Kenyon, Marion Davies and Mr. Hearst, who was talking of setting up a production company for Marion's pictures. Mr. Hearst made a fuss over "little Murray," the girl with insatiable curiosity. And Mr. Griffith remembered her from the *Sans Souci*: "I talked to you about pictures then. Why didn't you come out to me, you little so-and-so!" And there were Blanche Sweet and Alice Joyce and her husband. Once in a while Wally Reid and Dorothy would appear, talking

about their baby son. Once in a while Mary Pickford and her husband Owen Moore.

There were weird rumors about Jack Pickford and how he'd been spoiled as a lad in Cuba, when Mary was making pictures there, and about Wally Reid. Too much success and money, too much adulation had gone to their heads, the rumors said; dope, the scandalmongers whispered, even if Jack did look like innocence itself in *Tom Sawyer* and Wally like virtuous manhood in armor opposite Farrar.

Mae never listened; she walked away from gossip. These beautiful people, the darlings of the gods, were a new royalty and they must keep themselves regal. It was ridiculous for Mabel Normand to endorse Gossard's corsets (she told her so), for other stars to smear themselves with Pompeian Beauty Cream. It was important to keep yourself pristine and inviolate for the public that adored you, wrote to say so, and followed you with affection wherever you went.

Often she and Bob would slip into local movie houses to see their pictures. While the credits came on, they would find aisle seats and before the lights came up at the end, they'd hurry out. But even in the dark, the fans spotted her and a tremor would run through the house, into her bloodstream. "Mae Murray! That's Mae." There'd be dozens of them in the lobby willing to miss the end of the picture for her autograph.

"Write to me at the studio. I'll send autographed pictures," she'd murmur breathlessly, as Bob guided her to the shelter of their chauffeured car.

"You stand for everything they love about movies," Bob said once. "An exciting world apart."

Sometimes, very late, they'd wander down to Third and Spring Street for hot Italian bread, split and buttered and sprinkled with Parmesan cheese, or they'd find a Chinese restaurant down near the depot. And wherever they went, people seemed eager to welcome her and shower her with admiration.

They went to the fights and to football games, where she

ressed in a white jacket of Persian lamb, and audacious white
k sports hat. They bought Liberty Bonds and appeared at
untless ward-bond rallies. But what reality did war have for
em? Yes, American soldiers were in Europe now, and war
ovies were being made on every lot. The Committee on Pub-
c Information had created a Film Division just to sell the war
America, and the honor of half the heroines of the screen
as in jeopardy at the point of German bayonets. But not for
er and not for Bob. They'd seen *The Little American* and
Hearts of the World and felt that the talents of Pickford and
ish had been sacrificed to an almost ridiculous concentration
n the melodramatic Hun. That horrible Von Stroheim! Bob
id the only really effective war picture was Charlie Chaplin's
onderful burlesque, *Shoulder Arms*. The little man with the
oustache won the war all by himself—but it was only a
eam.

While others tackled the war, they stuck with the world of
ake-believe which could give audiences delight and escape,
cite them a little and send them home happy. It seemed only
rother phase of make-believe when they stood up in costume
the bond rallies and pledged allegiance to the flag. For one
bleau, she and Bob represented Great Britain and Wally Reid
merica. It was all flags and drums and showmanship; they
ade a number of short subjects to urge the sale of bonds and
e enlisting of men, never believing for one moment that any-
ing could happen to America.

The war was something far away and here they were, safe
nd snug. It was a complete rapport, this marriage, at least as
r as Mae was concerned. Here was another person to share
er work and daily problems and adventures. She no longer
d to fight for each detail, it was all done for her. As for Bob,
e hadn't won his bride over to passion, but he still imagined
at he could. To him she was more alluring than ever, more
autiful and womanly. He had to keep himself under a rigid
ontrol that sometimes frayed his nerves. No one knew, least of
l Mae. He had a formidable reserve, a placid exterior, and

the temperament of the popular conception of a strong, silent man. There were many nights when he paced his rooms. He wanted to waken her, talk to her, show her what love could be. But the truth is—he was scared to death of Mae. He'd seen her temper flare on the set, he knew how sensitive she was, and he didn't dare risk it. To an extent she was his creation. He lavished patience on her, accepted the crumbs of emotion she allowed him, and smothered his own frustration.

But she had surprised him with her taste for housekeeping. Their house was Spanish hacienda-style, attractive and well-kept with its gardens and furnishings. She had Spanish and Italian antiques and art objects, peach-colored satin sheets on every bed and small lace pillows. There were six cats always underfoot. When a truck demolished one creamy Persian, he never told her but pretended it was lost and went out dutifully every night to search for it while she changed for dinner. They danced in the evening; he held her in his arms, saw the envious glances of other men and the happiness on her face. Next morning, he'd shoot around her. She hated waking early and he arranged the day's work so that she could come in late, and later, so that she could have a quiet noon hour. Mae always lunched in her dressing room on the set, then rested half an hour to be fresh, alive and romantic for the camera.

One afternoon, she saved the life of "Ralph McCibbon" and nursed him back to health. "Ralph" was played by Ralph Graves, an angelic-looking young man with a pompadour of blond hair who'd been kicking about from studio to studio and hadn't gotten anywhere yet but probably would (he did; Griffith "discovered" him two years later). One of his assets (in addition to clean manliness) was a full, sensuous mouth with curved upper lip and a broad thin-skinned underlip that grew parched and deep pink as it uttered endearments.

"You had some pretty ardent love scenes with Graves this afternoon. Doesn't that bother Mr. Leonard?" asked a reporter who'd been on the set all day.

"When I go into a scene, I'm no longer me, I am totally the

character. Betty saves a stranger from death, holds him in her arms, and adores him of course. But what has that to do with me? Mr. Leonard is an artist. He understands."

The reporter shook his head. To his way of thinking this was quite a business. Most people, married, had only slight chances to stray; but in the studios, these actors spent their days making love to other people's husbands or wives.

"Dear," Bob said, two days later. "I don't believe you need to cling to Graves in the auction scene. You have the artistry to convey this with a glance." He flushed up to his burnished hair—Bob, who asked so little of her, who never pressed. Surely he believed in the character who came alive under the hot arcs. She put the matter from her mind and became totally immersed in preparations for the new picture, a comedy, *The Delicious Little Devil*.

One day Olive phoned. Had Mae read the papers? Rudy di Valentina was in serious trouble in New York. Mae hadn't seen Rudy in some time. When she and Bob had been in New York, he'd been touring with Joan Sawyer in John Colt's show *The Masked Model*. Everyone thought Rudy was doing well and for a while he had been. After Bonnie Glass married scene designer Ben Ali Haggin, Rudy had gone on dancing successfully with Joan Sawyer in vaudeville and at the Woodmansten Inn. But the Colt show was a fiasco. It folded in Ogden, Utah. Rudy scraped together enough money to get to San Francisco, where he taught in second-rate dance academies and tried to hold the women at bay. The first great blow fell in San Francisco—he tried to enlist for the Italian Army now that America had declared war, and was rejected. It was the second rejection of his life; he'd been turned down as a youngster for the Italian Naval Academy because his chest expansion lacked one inch.

Norman Kerry, who'd played in a couple of films, urged Rudy to come down to Hollywood and Frank Carter smuggled him onto *The Passing Show* train. But Rudy's entry into moviedom was not auspicious. He got extra work in a picture

or two but you couldn't eat on that, and he quickly moved out of the Hotel Alexandria to which Norman Kerry had steered him. He danced at Baron Long's Watts Tavern for thirty-five a week with a girl named Marjorie Tain, and got the villain's part in a picture, *The Married Virgin*. The movie was not released, for some reason; and just then came news of his mother's death. That was enough of Hollywood.

Mae knew none of this. She was not a letter-writer, nor was Rudy; now he was back in New York and in jail. She phoned at once. He was being held on a thousand-dollar bail bond. She didn't ask why. The money would be wired and Rudy was to come west at once. She wouldn't listen to objections.

"Rudy, we'll put you in our picture, you'll be my leading man. But you must come at once. Don't stay where there's a downbeat."

Bob wasn't quite so sure. The fellow had never acted. And hadn't she said he was Italian? Did she think he'd fit into the part of an Irish contractor's son? Besides, the budget.

"Bob, it takes only one finger to save a life. Rudy's a special person, a man with great depth. We don't even have to bother the studio about it, can't we pay the salary ourselves?"

They sent their car to the train for him and Rudy arrived at the studio, his attire as dashing as ever, a camel's-hair coat, almost white, flung over one arm. But his bearing was subdued, nothing like the Rudy of Maxim's.

"Murray, thank you." He took her hand. He was trembling.

Bob greeted him very jovially. "Rudy! I want you to have lunch with me, we'll talk script and you can come on the set this afternoon and watch how we operate. But you and Mae have a lot to talk about, if you'll excuse me."

They sat looking at each other without a word. He had changed, the dark eyes were deep with sorrow. Once he started talking, the story came out in a torrent. Jack deSaulles had found out about him, had had *him* followed, framed on a false charge and arrested, so that whenever the time did come when Rudy would appear in court to offer evidence in Blanca's

divorce effort, his testimony wouldn't be believed. They'd ask the simple question, "Have you ever been in jail?" and the answer would have to be yes.

He put his head in his hands. "She did not come forward to help me, Murray. She must have known. *You* knew three thousand miles away! Jack's uncle is in politics, they have power. She knew and she let me stay in that foul jail four days." He began to sob. "Obviously, she does not love me."

"Here take my hand. Think of Jesus. His hand is always there for you, Rudy. Hold it, hard."

"Blanca," he cried.

"She didn't mean to harm you. She's so beaten down herself, she can't think. To her it's all hopeless. Rudy, listen, what you prepare for, you get. Think up. Have faith."

He turned away, composed himself, tried to smile.

"In what, Murray? Faith in what?"

"In yourself. People have picked me out ever since I was born. They pick you out. I did, the first time I saw you, out of a crowd of fascinating people. Because magnetism is like a light. Some people have a 60-watt bulb. Some have 150 watts. You have a full one hundred and fifty. Never doubt it."

His outburst of tears had stopped. He listened to her quietly and seemed comforted.

"Rudy, wait 'til you see what happens when they take you to their hearts. The public is waiting for people like you, performers without depth bore them."

He started to work the next day. Whatever he was feeling, Rudy was innately gallant, and he wanted to please them; he did his best to be "Jimmie Calhoun," son of a millionaire Irish contractor who falls in love with the pretty night-club dancer in *The Delicious Little Devil*. Mae was the vivacious girl who pretends to be Gloria de Moin, a notorious young woman who has had an affair with the Duke de Sauterne. "Jimmie" is abashed at seeing her dance in skin-colored tights with transparent draperies. There was one scene where she seemed actually *nude* in her dressing-room pool. Then, lo and behold,

he discovers that she is just the neighborhood's little Mary McGuire—their fathers were fellow bricklayers.

Mae romped through the part, playing not only to the unseen audience but to an audience of one, trying to cheer him. And Rudy began to find picture-making fascinating. Mechanical activities intrigued him; he liked machinery, he studied lights and reflectors. Rudy had never seen a chase and he pored over the map Bob had drawn, plotting the action for the final sequence where the Duke pursues Mary, and Jimmie is after the Duke. At the end of each day, he asked if he might see rushes. They enjoyed sitting side by side in the screening room watching themselves in the innocent young love scenes.

It was only in between, during long waits for a new scene, that Rudy had time to brood about his sorrows.

One day when she saw him standing apart locked within himself, she had an inspiration. "Play a tango," she asked her musicians. Rudy came to life at once, he took her across the great barn of a stage, his eyes fixing her in the smoldering tango trance, and the crew applauded. It became their habit to dance between set-ups.

"This is not a dance hall," was Bob's terse comment. He smiled and tried to make it seem a joke, but his attitude toward Rudy changed. When the velvet eyes turned to him in a scene, they were met with bare tolerance.

"What is it, Bob? What's come over you?" Mae asked.

"I don't like him. He loves you."

"Bob Leonard! Rudy's my friend. Can't you see how he's suffering for love of someone else?"

They had their first quarrel then and Bob did not come home from the studio. When he did come, she saw he'd been drinking heavily. She pretended not to notice, and retired early to her own suite. Nothing must ever interrupt the harmony of their working partnership. She didn't invite Rudy to join them for dinner after that. On the set she turned her attention to two of the extra children who worked in the neighborhood scenes. Bob was adroit in handling children. They scampered

about on camera quite unself-consciously, only becoming shy and awkward between scenes when they returned to their mothers on the sidelines. The mothers seemed uniformly sharp-eyed and long-armed, they literally pushed the children to the fore so Bob would notice them, so that perhaps the camera would single out little Willie or Maggie and start his rocket rising.

But two of the youngsters played together unconcerned. They sat on the floor, scrubbing a battered doll, or danced and twirled about behind piles of props as if this were home. No mama pushed them. They were independent as Mae herself had been. The two were cousins, little Gretchen Young and Colleen Traxler; Colleen's father was a supervisor for Lasky. Colleen could print her own name, she scrawled it on Mae's script, but Gretchen was forever dancing. She was a graceful little thing, scrawny as a bird with huge haunting violet eyes and she already had the wiles and graces of a budding actress. A wonderful idea suddenly came to Mae. This was her and Bob's last picture at Universal, they were taking the summer off before starting a new committment.

"Bob, let me take Gretchen and Colleen home for a few days. They're such dear little things, I'd love to baby them for once, get them pretty dresses, and let them play in our garden instead of on some dusty movie set."

He liked the idea, she could tell. But he protested, "Good Lord, Mae, what would you do with them?"

"Teach them to dance, play with them." When she wanted something badly enough, he always gave in. The children stayed more than three months and it was a happy time. There were dancing lessons in the garden and prayers at night and a governess to teach them their letters, and Jenny to cook wholesome food for them. There were parties at friends' homes, a bevy of children and adults drinking pink lemonade, playing Puss in Boots and Hide and Seek and Pin the Tail on the Donkey. Bob always managed to pin the tail on the donkey's ear or nose, or yards away on the garden fence and Mae would

sit on the floor with "her children" rocking with laughter. He organized the games, the children climbed all over him, he had never been so relaxed and genial.

It was a form of play-acting. The Leonards in the roles of devoted parents. But to Mae the acting became very real.

"Bob, why don't we adopt them!" she said one night, coming to him around the billiard table. "Please, Bob."

He chalked his cue carefully. "And when we go to New York?"

"Leave them with the governess, have her bring them on for the holidays."

"Mae, Mae," he shook his head. "It isn't a screen play, dear. The little girls need time and love and you have contracts at Pathé and Paramount and I at Cosmopolitan. Even if our work were less demanding, these are real children, they have real parents."

"But, Bob, if the parents don't mind, they're such little beauties."

The parents *did* mind and she was crushed.

"Don't cry, Maitzie;" Gretchen said, "don't cry, darling Maitzie. We can play house a little longer. Mama says I don't have to come home just yet." This child's sensitivity was to work well for her later when she did become a movie star. She never changed much. Only her name changed. Gretchen became Loretta Young.

8



Bob seemed sensitive about her working away from him. He questioned her daily and minutely about the brilliant Irish-French director George Fitzmaurice and she tried from the first not to show how excited she was. *On With the Dance* was an excellent script, an original by Fitzmaurice's wife, Ouida Bergere, and it offered—instead of the usual nefarious villain, virtuous hero and goody-goody heroine—believable human beings capable of both good and evil. Sonia, the sensuous little Russian dancer, was the best character role Mae had ever been offered, a girl of impulses, warm-hearted, self-willed, devilish. Nothing was being spared to make this picture the most daring thing ever done on New York café society and the motives of real people living at fever tempo.

Fitzmaurice was soon to be a power in filmdom. He had been a painter in Paris before turning to the theatre and movies; he was a master craftsman with a flare for the exotic; he was known already as an ace woman's director—Elsie Ferguson had given one of her best performances in his film, *The Avalanche*. In their first discussions, he showed Mae a talent for satire but he also showed a sympathetic knowledge of charac-

ter. He was a serious artist and accepted her as one. Out from under Bob's protective wing, she was now being regarded as a top star in her own right. Fitzmaurice discussed the script, the scenes, the art of staging, the use of the subdued lighting he loved. When she explained how important clothes were to her interpretation, how she planned them with the same care she put into character development, he gave her carte blanche on costumes. When she suggested that the constant shifting of the crew on the set, the bobbing heads, disturbed her mood—she wished they could wear black hoods, perhaps of black China silk that would blot into the darkness—the maestro was willing to try it. And of course, she said, the set must be closed.

"Little Miss Box Office, this one," that's how Zukor introduced her. And that's how she was treated.

If she spared Bob the glowing details (which in retrospect made their ten films at Universal seem like quickies), she did show how happy she was to be back in New York, how gratifying it was to be pampered in every whim by the same company which had carped about the ecru lace wedding veil little more than a year ago. She thanked Bob for having arranged it all so cleverly. The dream was still to have a company of their own and he had engaged excellent legal advice; but financing wasn't easy at a time when the industry had been badly hit by the flu and the war. Theatres and studios had closed for four weeks because of the flu epidemic and millions of patrons were away in training camps or overseas. The way Bob analyzed it, Zukor was still the most influential man in the business and controlled major purse strings. He had just added Realart to his enterprises and combined with Hearst to form Cosmopolitan. First National had no trouble getting money, with Chaplin and Pickford, whose salaries also kept the company virtually broke. Griffith could still get funds despite the *Intolerance* fiasco. But Triangle and Mutual had failed and Selznick had barely been saved. Production costs and salaries were so exorbitant, companies didn't show the profit they should, every minor executive was milking the incredible in-

come. "One of these days," Bob said, "and soon, this business is going to get too big to be financed by the inside crowd. We'll bide our time."

Meanwhile they'd each had good offers, Bob to direct Marion Davies for Cosmopolitan, Mae to make two pictures with Leonce Perret for Pathé, then four with Fitzmaurice at Paramount (Famous Players-Lasky was now Paramount) at a perfectly enormous figure. Not that money meant much. It came naturally now, rolled in, more than they could ever spend, more than they had dreamed possible; nothing could stop the avalanche.

It was on this tide of wealth and high spirits that they came east and found an apartment for sublease in the *Des Artistes* where there were ballrooms and dining rooms, a swimming pool and dumbwaiter service so that food could be sent up at all hours. If she was to depict glamour and rich living, then why not live that way? She bought a solid gold service as soon as they got to New York, and golden china.

"Good Lord, Mae!"

But why not? She held a cup to the light, showing Bob how soft and shimmering it was, "Like the Cellini chalice at the Metropolitan Museum, Bob. It always thrilled me."

She had gowns of gold and her first furs and a dazzling big marquis diamond from Tiffany's (she bought it herself, paid cash for everything herself, she actually carried little bags of gold, that was part of the fun); they dressed every night, went to the theatre, dined and danced at the Embassy, the 400, the Knickerbocker, the Ritz-Carlton; there were orchestras everywhere, some places had three. New York was gayer than ever, the war pall vanished, the flu pall forgotten, the city pulsing with music and blooming with celebrities. Renowned statesmen and authors awed her slightly until she found they were all vying to dance with her. Everywhere she was besieged for autographs. When they attended the premiere of a picture, autograph seekers surrounded the car, held up traffic, someone even clipped a lock of her hair before police could form a

cordon and convey them on. Oh, it was glorious! The public mobbed her wherever she went, ran after her, called out greetings, wrote poetry. She *was* the princess drinking goat's milk from a golden goblet, guarded by her Russian wolfhound Kenos; Bob was the prosperous prince (putting on a little weight but handsome in his London clothes).

Only when she came home from the 56th Street Studio at the end of a day she'd find him pacing up and down the pastel apartment, sulking and sullen. She was late again. Where had she been? What had she been doing?

Well, today she'd been to the Russian settlement on the East Side to study types and get the feel of an atmosphere Sonia Varnoff would know. She had talked with the neighborhood children and stayed to meet their sisters who were factory workers. It appalled her to find that these girls worked so hard and had so little. The apartments were ugly. She'd ended up at the community house, dancing for them, and one of the mothers gave her an authentic shawl to wear in the picture. She flung it around her shoulders and improvised a quick mazurka.

"I want to give a party for the older girls, Bob. I'll call Frances Marion and Fred Thompson. Fred was a chaplain in the army, he'll help me; we can put it on at the community house, we'll have music and refreshments."

He had begun to smile in spite of himself. "You and your charities."

"No charity about it, I like the girls. Oh, and Bob, I told you about the stunning curtain of rock crystals for Sonia's night-club act? I've bought it. The minute we finish shooting that sequence, we'll hang the whole shimmering thing across the entrance to our dining room."

"I want to take you abroad when we finish here. It would be fun to show you Europe. And I want to take a camera and shoot some background art. It may come in handy; you never know when we'll do a picture. Mae!"

She looked up quickly, so that he wouldn't know she'd been

far away, in the movie, sitting on her lover's lap, beguiling and confusing him; perhaps as she turned she'd see the photograph of his sweetheart on the desk. Yes, that would be good, she'd write a note tonight to Fitzmaurice. She wanted to write him too about the courtroom scene when Sonia takes the stand trying to save Peter by claiming that *her* misconduct with the man he'd shot justified the shooting. She'd make up heavily to seem sophisticated, wear a hat with two black birds of paradise, a coat trimmed with monkey fur, very daring, and hose with black lace inserts to the knee! She'd cross her legs, reveal the lace inserts and the jury would lean out of the box to a man. Fitzmaurice must not stop the cameras when her mascara started to run. Let the jury *see* it, they'd believe then that she was a fast person, it would help Peter.

"Mae, I'm talking about Cécile Sorel. I want you to see her work. You'll find her a superb actress, and a real sophisticate."

She heard that because she wanted so to play a French actress. There was an aura about them, especially Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*. "I saw her at the Palace, Bob. How she acted—and with only one leg. She's always with me. She *is* the theatre."

He nodded. His mood had lightened, his eyes calmed, but she'd have to be careful she knew, skirt the danger areas. And why? Wasn't jealousy a sign of possessiveness rather than of love? Bob worried about the handsome Scotsman, David Powell, who played Peter. He was real to her in a scene, but she felt nothing physical, there was nothing to carry away once the scene was over. Good heavens, David had made episode after episode of *Gloria's Romance* with Billie Burke and she felt sure Ziegfeld hadn't lost a night's sleep over it. Bob was free to work with Marion or whomever he wished, exerting the full force of *his* talent. But she must be free too, no one must push her.

Somone had just written that she was "Scheherazade in the Claridge Lounge, a hula danced to mandolin music, the fire of four lips, absinthe and ice cream." She was all of that! She had never felt more alive or worked harder. *On With the Dance*

finished, the papers crammed with publicity, work started on *The Right to Love*. Mae talked to Fitzmaurice about a prologue, explaining as she had to Bob how a prologue could set the mood. The maestro's black eyes flashed; he walked up and down, touching the points of his black moustache, fingering the white carnation in his buttonhole; you could sense the vitality under his polished exterior. She had seen what imaginative things he could do, the little touches in his pictures that achieved so much.

Background for the new film was Turkey; to approximate Turkey, they rented an island off the coast of Miami. David Powell again, Alma Tell again, they were like a family. They went to Miami too for *Idols of Clay*, where the South Sea Island girl finds the young derelict—David Powell once more. Bob came down for week ends when he could. He couldn't bear the sight of David Powell. David was such a talented man, but Mae worried about him because he seemed to have no stability. "What good is success, David, unless you have purpose and faith?"

In this picture the heroine follows her hero to London, falls into the hands of a rival and becomes a dope fiend. The lovers are reunited in the lowest opium den in Whitechapel.

Mae knew nothing about dope; she needed to know. Fitzmaurice called in the city authorities, a doctor and two plainclothesmen were assigned to escort her on a tour of the city prisons. For four days, she gazed in horror at hopeless derelicts in strait jackets, saw them writhe, heard them scream. Victims of morphine, addicts of cocaine, the doctor told her.

"How does it start? How does it happen?" she asked, shuddering.

"It often begins during illness. They're given medication with morphine or cocaine and come to depend on it. Or they start because they are tired—people who love a good time and don't allow themselves enough sleep. They begin to feel ill and consult a physician. There are unscrupulous doctors, you know, especially in Hollywood and in New York, who cater

to those in the limelight. The doctor gives them sleeping pills or what have you, and as long as the 'medicine' works the patient asks no questions."

The doctor studied Mae's earnest face and wondered if she was putting on an act. Didn't everyone know that there was a lively dope racket on the coast? Studio heads were worried about a number of big-name players who were literally living it up, to say nothing of the hundreds of discouraged youngsters who were pouring into the movie capital from all over the country hoping for jobs that never materialized. Many eager young hopefuls, wooed by the publicity and by the promises of phony talent schools, turned to vice in their disappointment. But the worst offenders were stars who had gotten to the top too quickly and lacked the stamina to cope with sudden wealth and a confused identity. They fell in love with their own publicity and, like children in an arsenal, began playing with dynamite.

"Miss Murray, certainly you know that a number of stars, people you must have worked with..."

"No indeed," she said quickly. "Those are just vicious rumors. There are vultures who hate the sight of success. We live in an atmosphere of stimulation and fervency but there is every reason...it comes from natural sources...it's like riding a great Ferris wheel."

"And a few fall off."

She looked at him in dismay, trying not to remember the ugly whispers about Wally Reid and Jack Pickford, the party for Fatty Arbuckle at Brownie Kennedy's roadhouse. Attorney General Allen of Massachusetts had recently brought action for the removal of District Attorney Nathan Tufts of Middlesex County for covering up a party which movie magnates had hushed up by paying the girls involved a hundred thousand dollars. She didn't believe any of it. Not for a moment.

"Doctor," she said gently, "you are mistaken. Believe me. These poor pariahs we have seen in delirium—and I'll never in my life forget them—these are people without resources.

It couldn't happen to people who are in the mainstream of life."

The doctor shook his head. "I think she really means it," he told the skeptical plain-clothesmen when they'd delivered her safely back to her hotel.

Mae didn't forget the derelicts. She brought to *Idols of Clay* all the anguish she'd felt for them, portraying the toils of the drug so well that Fitzmaurice let her have free rein. In each picture now, there was a chance to dance, one major dance was woven into each script and with this she had free rein too. They shot the *Idols of Clay* dance last, a scene where the rival introduces her at a party and, under the influence of dope, she dances in ribbons when the ribald guests disrobe her.

It was an effective dance, but Mae never used it again. At that time, when she was called on for benefits—and there were benefits for one charity or other every week—she used the Sonia Varinoff dance. Mae was in greater demand than almost any other movie actress for benefits, because she had something she could do and she was glad to perform before a live audience and felt repaid a thousand times by their applause.

For a charity performance at the Eltinge, a male partner was provided as usual, and Mae came down a half-hour early to rehearse. She had never danced with Dan before, a tall, dreamy-eyed man who proved a strong supple partner and understood instructions. He swung her easily to his shoulder or posed her on his bent leg, bending her back as effortlessly as if she were a swaying flower.

In the middle of their dance, he was to balance her on his shoulder and let her slip slowly down. Suddenly, with her on his shoulder, he began galloping around the room like a mad horse. She grabbed his hair and hung on. The musicians played louder.

"Dan, stop!" she whispered fiercely. "Listen to the music. Let me down." But he kept on his crazy rush and run, seized a backdrop and started to rip it. She signaled frantically to the stage manager, and the curtain fell.

Stagehands rushed from the wings. Mae was holding tight about his neck now but she swung her legs out, pushed away and dropped—just in time. Dan had seized a stage brace and was swinging, no one could get near him. Out front the band kept playing and there was a growing murmur; but the show couldn't go on until firemen came and turned the hose on Dan.

"On junk, poor bastard," someone said. "They all crack sooner or later."

She cried all the way home in the cab, nursing a twisted ankle. A dope addict had danced with her, held her, she shuddered at the memory of his strange cloying smell.

Bob begged her to knock off, take a holiday, go with him to Europe. She'd been working too hard; so had he. But she was committed to one more picture at Paramount.

"Talk to Zukor, please, dear."

She looked at him, surprised. He sounded lonely. A great big man like Bob! And when Zukor came down next day to watch them shoot on the new concrete stage at the Long Island studio, she did speak to him.

Zukor treated her with mock seriousness. "Ask anything you want of me, Mae, only don't cry. Whenever she cries, it costs me," he told Fitzmaurice and Ouida. "She's a real fighter."

"But I fight for the picture, for things that will make it good."

"Go to Europe," Zukor said. "For heaven's sake go to Europe so you can come back and make us another picture and fight for whatever you want, girl. You're gold at the box office."

Bob was overjoyed. She hadn't seen him in such a mood since the first days of their working together. "I never knew that work could be a benediction," he had said then. It seemed a long while ago. But now he was like that again, exhilarated and eager, calling the steamship lines, arranging passage, cabling Paris and Madrid, ordering trunks, huge trunks in which her clothes could hang full length. One trunk for her furs, one for her shoes. There were furs all over the bed, all over the chairs. And she must have a rough tweed suit and a

fur cape and chiffon, always chiffon, it followed your every motion, floated almost alive. She jotted down her necessities and went out on a shopping spree. At the first stop she ran into Olive Thomas.

"I'm going to Europe," Olive cried. "We leave in two weeks. Jack said I could take fifty trunks!" She blushed unexpectedly and burst into tears.

"Olive, what is it? Come into this fitting room. There. What's wrong?"

"Jack and I have had a terrible time, you must have read in the columns."

"I don't read gossip, I don't hear it. Like the three wise monkeys—see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil."

"Unfortunately, it's sometimes true. Mae, I don't know what's wrong with us. Jack's such a darling... maybe he's too handsome. The girls adore him, they throw themselves at him."

"Now, Olive..."

"I don't want to believe it, but I can't help it. I almost lost him. Instead, we're going to Paris, and I'm to buy a whole new trousseau. He's like a different boy, Mae. He's never really had to assume responsibility. His mother even handled his money. He's been sheltered and spoiled and he's so beautiful!" Her face grew radiant. "Now we're going to start all over like lovers. Come with me, I want to show you this night-gown."

Bridal white. Olive bought that and a blue one, and Mae ordered some sheer lace panties.

"Cobwebs!" Olive said. "They're positively cobwebs."

"That's all I wear. No bras, nothing but these under my dress. I like clothes to follow *me*."

They shopped together the whole afternoon, and arranged to meet at the Ritz in Paris for lunch, three weeks from that day.

Olive and Jack sailed on the *Aquitania*, Mae and Bob sailed on the *Olympic*. These were gay crossings, the first real surge of overseas travel since the war, with all the champagne you

could drink once they'd crossed the twelve-mile limit. Prohibition had drained all the liquor out of New York, but here on the high seas there were French and Rhine vintages. For Mae Bob ordered May wine with strawberries floating in it, her favorite. They dined alone in their suite and he watched her as he had so often watched through the camera eye. She was wearing pale blue organza, so delicate it seemed cloudlike. As she twirled the stem of her glass, Bob studied her and planned his courtship. This was the honeymoon they'd never had. The ingénue who'd first come to Hollywood had grown into an important star. It was time she bloomed as a woman. Contemplating it put him in excellent humor, which was dissipated as they stepped off the boat train at Gare du Nord in a shower of rose petals. Hands were outstretched with a dozen bouquets, but that wasn't enough. The fools were shouting and showering her with rose petals.

"You are French, Mademoiselle Murray, yes?" The reporters asked.

"No, Irish. A little Italian."

"You look so French and act so French. *On With the Dance!*"

Everywhere her work was known, crowds gathered for a glimpse of her. There were luncheons, honors, civic dinners, boating parties, theatre and opera. Cécile Sorel gave a soiree at her historic mansion, once the home of Voltaire on the Quai Voltaire across from the Louvre. Mae went in white lace with a big Leghorn hat weighted with roses; Bob had barely given their names to the footman when Cécile herself appeared in the marble foyer.

"Leetle dove!" she cooed. "We know you already, we love you." This from the French actress who had established herself for all time in Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, darling of the Comédie Française, adored by Foch, Briand, Barres, Cocteau and D'Annunzio. Her presence was dazzling, so was her perfume. Not a beautiful woman—sharp-nosed, sharp-chinned—but Mae had never seen anyone like her. And the house!

"This is what I wanted you to see," Bob said. Marble stairways with wrought-iron balustrades wound from floor to floor, dolphins sent water spurting in high fountains, the flooring was of parquet, there were large Gobelin tapestries, a drawing room hung with red Venetian damask, another drawing room of white brocade; the dining room was pink and white marble hung with leopard skins, Regency chairs were upholstered in tiger skin, the butlers wore white satin livery. Every ceiling was exotically lighted and lights adroitly focused on countless works of art—in the center of the chimney piece, a Greek statue from the excavations at Delos, paintings by Guardi and Tiepolo, portraits by Largilliere, Perroneau and La Tour. Art in all its forms was Sorel's obsession.

In the salon of white brocade, Mae and Bob were introduced to at least a hundred guests and Cécile insisted Mae dance à la Sonia Varnoff.

While the guests sat about, on chairs, tables, and cushions, Mae gave instructions to the musicians and then went into her dance, twirling, kicking her legs in the Russian manner. Suddenly something fluttered about her feet. Her lace panties! She kicked them away nonchalantly (at the blanchisserie where she sent them to be washed and accordion-pleated, the elastic must have been weakened). She could see Bob's face, pink as a carnation; but her dance ended to wild applause and when she sought to retrieve her panties the guests added cheers and laughter, holding up souvenirs of gauzelike white the size of postage stamps.

Cécile Sorel was delighted. "Leetle dove, you are beeg succès," she cried. "They all love you. Come with me, I give you brand new pair of britches."

The actress' boudoir was as dramatic as the rest of the house: the enormous bed had belonged to Madame DuBarry, it was of gilt wood with a crown of roses and four slender posts surmounted each by a perfumed censer.

Incense burned, music played, there was a dressing table with countless perfume bottles, powders, unguents.

"Why so many perfumes?" she asked Cécile.

"Different friends, different scents. You are inquisitive, yes?" Her long fingers toyed with the strands of pearls that circled her throat and fell in loops to her knees.

"Again, do that again," Mae implored. "Show me how you use those pearls. Someday I'm going to portray a great French actress, I must know."

Cécile laughed. "You have it, leetle one. You study everything. It shows in your work." She shrugged her expressive shoulders.

They spoke of Duse and of Bernhardt. Cécile had met the Duse through D'Annunzio, she adored the great actress and thought hers the highest peak of art. She also loved Bernhardt. "The inexhaustible genius" she called her, and she described her visit with Bernhardt in the latter's Empire dressing room. Bernhardt had begged to be invited for luncheon on the Quai Voltaire and had forgotten to come! Next day, at Bernhardt's insistence, the entire party lunched with her.

"I give you a secret, leetle blonde dove, you like my house, I see that, you plan one very elegant for yourself, eh? Always have a place where you can retreat, a room all your own, for work, solitude, and meditation. I have such a room with a single table, a chaise longue, the books and art I like best. But," she held up one finger, "no one can enter. Fluids of others eat up our own fluid, we rest only where no other presence comes to trouble ours."

She studied Cécile Sorel's every gesture, stored it up as she stored up impressions everywhere.

In Madrid, going to the bullfights, she heard people in the streets chanting "*Mía Murra, Mía Murra*." She asked a Spanish friend what it meant.

"That is you! Didn't you know? They say your name."

To be recognized in Spain was entirely unexpected and gratifying. It showed how far-reaching American films and players were.

These people had such a feeling for art. You saw it at the

bullfight. She was afraid at first to look. "Don't let me see too much," she told their Spanish friend. But the duel in the arena had the quality of a dance, a tango. The great mad bull rushed out, slamming his horns against the planks. The spectators went wild. "Oh, don't let me see too much!" she cried. But when the toreador drove home his sword and the crowd carried him off, she got so excited she ran from the box, around to the dressing rooms, where crowds surrounded the toreador. They saw her in her white satin suit and orange beret. "*Mía Murra, Mía Murra!*" In rapid Spanish they told the toreador who she was and he promptly got to his feet and put her on *his* shoulder. She was mad for Spain!

Later, at their box, four members of the Salamanca family arrived to bow, kiss her hand and "If it is permitted, may we present our sister?" That night brought an invitation to dinner at their cool white marble house. Bullfighters, opera singers, cabaret artists, all sorts of colorful people went to the Salamancas'.

Mae walked about admiring objets d'art. The next day by emissary she received fourteen gifts, including two priceless paintings and a shawl blazing with gems.

"Is it usual?" she asked their Spanish friend. "Does everyone receive lovely gifts?"

The man laughed. "What did you do, Mae, run around admiring things? I thought so. Well now, send all this back. That's protocol. *Then* they send what they truly wish you to have."

What they wanted her to have was the lovely shawl and the painting of her matador in action. She saw their car, a custom-built Rolls Royce, and through them ordered a similar car to be shipped to her from England.

Bob was as intrigued with Spain as she was. They visited museums and night clubs and cabarets and came away convinced that it was *the* country of talent. "Bob, I want to play a Spanish girl, with dark hair. Let's do a Spanish picture. I feel

as if I've *lived* in Spain, that it is home." He smiled genially and took hundreds and hundreds of feet of film, street scenes "to have on hand."

Back in Paris, she met Olive on schedule, one o'clock at the Ritz. At least she was there on time. Olive came in a few minutes later, a tense, distraught girl too ill to eat. At once their table became a desperate island in all the gaiety. Mae tipped the waiter, took poor sobbing Olive by the arm and half-pulled, half-carried her to a cab. They rode about over the cobbled sunlit streets, while Olive poured her heart out.

Jack had left her the moment they reached Paris. She hadn't seen him since. A week had passed. She'd never worn the white nightgown. She had no idea where he was or what he was doing. The man was a stranger. And he'd been so nervous, so agitated, at first she'd been afraid he was ill. He said he was going to have some fun. That's what he'd said many times before, then he'd disappear. Olive needed some fun herself. Mae invited her to come to dinner with them. They'd call for her at eight.

But at seven Olive phoned to say Jack had returned, he was throwing a big party at Zelli's, forgive her, she wanted to be with him. Mae and Bob went to Zelli's too. It was one of the most fashionable restaurants in the world. Scott Fitzgerald phoned promptly from across the room. Friends of Cécile Sorel's dropped by, there was top brass from Paramount at the next table. While Mae talked with them, she kept her eye on the Pickfords. Olive looked frantic. Jack wouldn't talk to her or look at her. He was bright-eyed and talkative, drinking champagne, proposing toasts, the life of the party; but he wouldn't give Olive what her eyes pleaded for, a moment's personal attention.

The two girls spotted each other, raised their eyebrows, and met in the ladies' room. Olive was verging on hysteria; she said she was ready to die.

"It's no use. I love Jack and he doesn't know I'm here."

Mae talked rapidly about God. "You're never without Him, Olive. 'I come to give you life more abundant.' You have a precious life, believe in it."

"Mae, you're *really* Hollywood, you live in a dream."

She ran out then. Late that night beautiful Olive Thomas swallowed poison.

Paris lost its charm after that. Mae begged Bob to take her home. Work was the one anodyne she knew; but Bob was reluctant. This was the trip he'd planned so carefully, he wanted to take her to Italy and Switzerland.

"Bob, please cable Zukor, tell him I'm ready to start *The Gilded Lily*."

Bob was pacing up and down, agitated. Suddenly he crumpled into a chair.

"I can't do it. I can't bear to have you working with anyone but me."

She stood staring at him in dismay. This great bulk of a man behaving like an immature boy.

"I'm jealous, do you understand, Mae? Do you know what it means to be jealous?"

She did not know what jealousy was. All she knew was that he was suffering. He was overly sensitive, he read too much into her slightest gesture.

"Good Lord, Mae, you flirt without knowing it. It's as natural to you as breathing. The public senses it. There's provocation in every move you make!"

She was afraid he might cry!

"Tell me you don't want to work with anyone else. Tell me!" he shouted.

"Bob, I'll cable Mr. Zukor at once. There's nothing to get excited about! You will direct *The Gilded Lily*."

9



Now their marriage was really cemented, to Mae's way of thinking, there need be no further problems. They could be totally dedicated to creating their films. They could work, innovate, expand.

The whole industry was expanding. Paramount was releasing three or four pictures a week to as many as five thousand theatres. Extravagant productions boasting a top star rented for \$700 a week or more, and now Zukor was beginning to demand percentages on Paramount pictures. Even at Universal, some of Bob and Mae's pictures had been listed as "Mae Murray Specials" and were sold apart from the rest of the block (pictures were then customarily sold in blocks). *The Gilded Lily* would also go as a special, a "Leonard Production," at a high price. Exhibitors were building million-dollar movie palaces; they were willing to pay for a million-dollar star name and a costly production. If some producers fulminated against the star system and tried to peddle lesser luminaries, they discovered the error of their ways and folded before the march of companies who paid for top personalities. Only two elements could be depended on to bring the public to the box office—

the stars (idealized and idolized almost as gods) and the *kind* of picture. Some producers played it safe and followed familiar formulas: dramas, romances, action pictures, westerns, "shockers" or comedies.

Bob and Mae refused to be held down by formulas. Riding the crest, they dared to experiment, to follow their own bent. Why shouldn't the heroine be won by the worldly sophisticate rather than by the wholesome youth? Let the demure dancer wear a tall hat and twirl in the middle of a bowl of giant cherries (balloons lacquered red); she could waft the balloons away until only one was left and dance with that one, the balloon seemingly her sole costume.

New methods of lighting were being imported, new lenses from Germany. Expanding budgets made the sky the limit just when the sky was no limit. Outdoor scenes were shot indoors, great concrete stages could accommodate an army of extras and technicians.

Mae and Bob were aiming for the newest and the best. When she wanted a color prologue for *The Gilded Lily* and the studio balked at the cost, she begged Bob to proceed with color. She'd pay for it herself. High on a pedestal they stood their lily, wrapped stemlike in cloth of gold. White would *not* photograph, the color people said, gleaming gold would *not* photograph; but Bob and Mae used white and gold. From the lily's white heart she unwound her golden stem and emerged to dance her love dance in a jeweled G-string.

The studio nixed Lowell Sherman, prominent stage actor, for the worldly hero; but Mae and Bob had seen him in *The Sign on the Door*; he symbolized the man of the world whose affectations could not detract from his masculinity; they fought for him all the way to Zukor. It was the most perfect casting possible, she insisted, and Bob backed her up.

It was their last fight with Paramount. Before *The Gilded Lily* was finished, money was handed them on a silver platter for a company of their own. While negotiations were under way, she invited the gentlemen from Detroit to dinner at the

newly purchased, newly decorated apartment at the *Des Artistes*. Even the automobile tycoons were impressed. The hanging light above the piano had come from a Venetian palace; so had the heavily wrought golden chest and rare madonna, the great bronze lamps and marble stairs which led to the replica of an Italian garden. The Venetian couch was covered in ruby-red silk; firelight danced across the floor, which was buffed to the sheen of ebony. Mae hadn't forgotten Cécile Sorel's house. The glossy surface reflected the men's starched dinner shirts, the gleam of diamond studs and her misty dress.

She wore white embroidered chiffon and sat at the head of the table with eight men at either side, and Bob at the far end. It was a pity not to shoot the scene in color, for the ceiling of this Italian dining room was sky-blue, it had taken eight months to inlay it with gold, the walls were terra cotta, and the floor of Italian tile. The guests could look out over Central Park and see snow falling, while firelight washed the walls and the fountain played. Nor was the conversation less ornate. The automobile magnates wanted to invest millions in a production company to star Mae Murray at the staggering salary of \$5000 a week plus a percentage of the profits.

"You have the quality we want in our business—lavishness, optimism, courage. A little more exotic perhaps," said a solemn-faced man from General Motors.

"I *believe* in what we're doing," she said. "In every film. We all do, all who count. Have you seen Rudolph Valentino in *The Four Horsemen*? Then you know what I mean. When Rudy dances the tango, he is a Gaucho, the very personification of gauchos. We don't act our parts, Rudy or I or Douglas Fairbanks or Tom Mix. We actually live them."

"Well now, we don't pretend to be authorities on motion pictures," said a tall man with a domed bald head. "We leave that in your hands. We favor the type of production you've been doing, like *On With the Dance*."

"I like prologues and I like them in color."

"We like them too," said a Chrysler man. "And we liked the

bowl of cherries in *The Gilded Lily*. Please rest assured, you'll have the last word on everything."

"You can spend whatever you like."

"Shall we say eight pictures, two a year?"

"And expert technicians..."

"We'll get you the best directors."

"*Bob Leonard* is my director, the only one I want. We're a working unit," she said smiling to him across the candle flames. It would all be as it had in the beginning. They turned to Bob on the instant.

"Husband and wife, we'd like that," said a Buick man. "Your marriage is one of the few without a hint of scandal."

While liveried men served the second course on golden china, Adele, the French maid, whispered, "Pardon, madame," and handed her the telephone secreted in the corner cupboard. It was Mr. Zukor calling about the Paramount contract. She managed not to miss any of the conversation at table, while talking to Mr. Zukor, who was so kind and thoughtful. But wasn't he just as kind to Gloria?

"Of course Mary and Doug are okay now with this new United Artists setup."

"All the same, it was pretty nasty for a while, when that Attorney General of Nevada filed suit to set aside her divorce. What all did he charge?"

He had charged collusion, fraud and untruthful testimony. Mary Pickford had gone to Nevada under the name of Gladys Moore and established residence on a ranch at Genoa. Her divorce suit against Owen Moore was filed in nearby Minden and charged desertion. Coincidentally, Owen and a cameraman arrived in town (although the picture he was making with Elsie Janis hardly demanded a western location) and was served with papers. Then "Gladys Moore" and her mother went to court, the divorce was granted, "Gladys" stated she wished to live in Minden, Nevada, "a long time." Three weeks later she married Douglas Fairbanks at a quiet party at his home, one of the guests conveniently being the Reverend J.

Whitcomb Brougher, and another guest, R. S. Sparks a deputy county clerk who issued the license. Within two weeks Attorney General Leonard Fowler of Nevada filed suit to set aside the Moore divorce, and all America rallied to the defense of "our" Mary and Doug.

"A small thing can be made much of in newspapers," Mae said quickly. "It takes only one reporter who doesn't like you."

"The public is quick to make heroes and just as quick to censure them," Bob added.

"I'm sure Mary and Doug will survive," said the high-domed man and the subject was dropped. But Mae thanked heaven no one had ever been able to point a finger at her.

The talk centered now on a name for the new company. "Tiffany," she said. Anything from Tiffany meant quality, she treasured the diamond she'd bought there with her packets of gold. Bob was discussing the first picture under the new label. Mae had always wanted to play a French actress, and they'd recently read a script dealing with a New England hero whose home town refuses to accept his Parisian bride. They were now rewriting Edmund Goulding's rewrite of Ouida Bergere's original. Its title: *Peacock Alley*.

The automobile men laid their money on the line, and work began. Bob found a huge warehouse at Tenth Avenue and West 44th Street which could be rebuilt into a studio. Supermains were established in the street, the building was reinforced for fire protection; bathrooms and kitchens, stages and cutting rooms were built. Of course, there was a dressing-reception room for Mae, with tufted chaise longue and swans-down pillows, and a sloping board to lean against when she was in costume. It was like building their own world, this studio, and they could bring to it all the innovations and technical advances they'd longed for. They were joined by Ollie Marsh, their choice of cameraman, who arrived from Hollywood and started buying photographic equipment like a kid in toyland. He acquired German lenses, showing her and Bob how much smoother a print could result. He introduced them

to the baby spot, and they were excited by its possibilities. Mae would bend her head, then raise it slowly, while the baby spot revealed her face. There were snide comments—"Does *that* one love herself, she wants nothing but close-ups!" But it had nothing to do with self-love. In the theatre your body could speak, but in a film gestures had to be subdued, and facial expression had to be eloquent.

Now the gentlemen from Detroit wanted to know how the picture was going to be released. Filming was one thing; distribution another, very practical matter. What was being done about it?

Nothing had been done so far. Mae urged that they wait until the picture was finished. Her backers received this with alarm. She was a successful actress but what did she know about business? There were accepted ways of doing things. What was she going on, gambling this way? She was going on intuition, and Bob explained that Mae's intuition was not always easy to follow, but it was very reliable.

"You said I could carry out my ideas," she reminded them. "Very well, these are my ideas. Now let me show you our designs for the prologue." It was highly stylized à la Maxwell Parrish. "And let me show you the peacock herself."

Their eyes popped when she reappeared in a glittering skin-tight costume, a peacock crest of aigrettes on her head. The costume was actually wool tights from head to toe, thickly sewn with spangles to represent the feathered body of the bird; the massive tail of feathers could be lifted fanlike at the touch of her hand. The men went back to Detroit unconvinced but dazed.

It was July when they started shooting. Big Monte Blue, noted on screen for his rugged stoic heroes, mopped his brow and cursed the weather. He was powerful as "the man from New England," equally bewildered by New York night life and his French bride. His love-making was gentle; that's how Bob explained the script. "She's on a pedestal for you, Monte. Keep that in your consciousness. You worship her, but she's

almost untouchable." Passion was left to *her*, the "untouchable"; she conveyed it with every gesture of eyebrows, shoulders, lips.

She stepped out of the lights and suggested they break for Cokes. "You look so warm, Bob." His face was scarlet.

But it was even warmer when they got to the color sequences. In August she danced for hours under the tremendous lights. Time out only for make-up to be blotted, no sound but the music. Bob gave his instructions—as always—in a soft, steady voice. "We're ready," a moment for the date and the "take" number, then "let's go." In the background, hooded dominoes moved noiselessly adjusting lights and cables. Now that it was their own hand-picked company, the men wore their dominoes and no question. Of course they grouched about the heat, everyone grouched except the peacock. The peacock was in a world of her own. Every day hundreds of spangles melted under the lights and thirty women worked through the nights replacing them. Money was no object, Bob was right with her on everything.

After they saw the rushes each night, their chauffeur drove them through the hot dark to the East River pier, to the yacht they had rented. They'd lie on deck rocking to the gentle motion and planning for their presentation of *Peacock Alley*—how best to attract a releasing medium, perhaps even Metro, with its great string of Loew's Theaters. While wind ruffled her long hair, Mae watched the water and listened for an answer.

Why show the picture in a theatre at all, she wondered. Why not hire the grand ballroom of the Commodore Hotel and invite only the most important theatre owners, producers and bankers? Bob pointed out that the Commodore seated fifteen hundred people. That didn't daunt Mae. Good, they'd send out fifteen hundred engraved invitations. For once, the creative people would turn the tables, they'd make the businessmen come to them and beg to release the picture.

"And if they don't?"

She gave Bob lecture number three on faith. What was needed, she said, was God and guts. The automobile men received the idea with a good deal of apprehension, but Mae was already planning for the fifty-piece orchestra, a corps of ushers in full dress, parchment programs. By now Bob was as enthusiastic as she was.

That first preview of *Peacock Alley* was a night to remember. When they finally managed to get through the traffic jam and gain entrance to the hotel at eight o'clock, they found six thousand people in evening dress besieging the grand ballroom. It took an hour for the invited to be ushered in. There was excitement in the air, a portent of things to come. For the first time, as they climbed the stairs to their box in the upper tier, Mae found herself tremulous. She held her head high, and took only the tiniest dancing steps.

"Mae, there's Lillian Russell," Bob said.

The legendary Lillian, with her satin skin, flashing eyes and ample bosom, had been a star on Broadway before the century turned. Mae had seen her in vaudeville, but she wished she'd seen Lillian in her heyday, with Weber and Fields at the Music Hall, the toast of New York.

"I knew you when you were a baby," Lillian said in her rich voice, as she leaned across from the next box. "I used to tell Ziggy there was an actress in you." She introduced her husband, Alexander Moore of the diplomatic service.

Mae thanked Miss Russell and took her seat proudly, aware that this was the center of the stage tonight. But she was glad when the house lights dimmed and the orchestra struck up an overture. In the darkened room, the screen flashed out its title and credits, the glittering peacock raised her feathers, and color shimmered from the screen.

In the middle of the second reel came the theatre scene in Paris. The orchestra had been well rehearsed, the timing was exact; it was as if the audience were in a theatre watching a live dancer, the illusion so complete that when the dance

ended, there was a spontaneous outburst of applause. Mae was startled by a touch on her shoulder. Nick Schenck of Metro was leaning across from the box to her right, nodding and smiling. "We must be the ones to release this," he said.

She grasped Bob's hand. They had *won*. She saw the rest of the film through a mist of tears. Nothing better could have happened than that Schenck should want their picture for Metro.

Just a year before, Loew's Theatres had acquired a modest picture-producing company from which they occasionally picked up films. The time had come when Marcus Loew, whether he was interested in picture production or not (and he was not) had to produce pictures to safeguard his own theatre empire. His old friend Adolph Zukor had started the race for big money when he merged with Lasky and assumed direct control of the distribution of their pictures. Other men, like Loew, with strong theatre chains had gotten together to protect themselves against Zukor's high rentals by forming First National Exhibitors' Circuit and contracting independent producers to make films for them. In retaliation Zukor had been buying up first class houses right and left; and the dual between First National and Zukor (Paramount) left Loew no choice; he went into production. One of the first pictures he released was *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Since then Metro had become the "miracle studio," and Loew's Theatres made it the class studio as well.

Nick Schenck had been associated with Loew since 1908, when Loew sold a "scenic tour" to the amusement park run by Nick and his brother Joe in New Jersey. Paradise Park, it was called. After one summer of running the "scenic tour," Loew suggested that the Schencks join him in People's Vaudeville. Joe Schenck had later married Norma Talmadge and left Loew to produce films for Selznick, but Nick had stayed on to run the Loew theatre chain. He was regarded now as one of the most brilliant men in the business, and it was he who in-

sisted on releasing not only *Peacock Alley* but all eight Tiffany productions. It was a great victory, and so was the standing ovation in the ballroom when the picture was finished.

But there was no stopping here. Mae switched almost at once from the peacock to the bull, to dance with high shoes for hooves and two dangerous horns on her dark, red-wigged head; *Fascination* evoked what they had seen on their trip to Spain. They flew to Cuba for location shots, used the Morro Castle for the bull arena and a thousand extras to fill it (in the excitement four prisoners escaped). On the hot streets of Havana they staged the gay fiesta scene where the madcap American girl crashes the fiesta parade. Bob scoured the city for a white horse, but the only one they could find was a bakery horse used to going in double harness. Nothing to do but write in an attendant so that both horses could gallop into the parade together. It was an exciting mélange: the crowd of Cuban extras, the bakery horse which had never been ridden side-saddle, Bob shouting instructions through a megaphone and a Cuban translating them through *his* megaphone. It was a melee of flying hooves; when Mae's horse slipped, the crowd yelled "*Bravo*," "*Olé*."

The Cubans liked her, though they thought her very strange, a blond lady riding out all day under a fiery sun in top hat and tight riding habit. They liked Robert Frazer, too, as the toreador. He had the grave face, the dedicated air of the matadors Mae had seen in Spain. This dedication was something Mae understood; she watched his face when she danced as the bull.

"Mae, I think we should show more restraint in the café love scene," Bob said, after rehearsal.

"But this is a daring girl, Bob, an incorrigible little flapper whose creed is 'follow your impulse!' That's why her father *sent* her to Spain to her great aunt—because he couldn't control her."

"I don't like this fellow Frazer, he watches you with hot eyes." Bob's face was flushed, his eyes looked sullen. "The picture's all sex from beginning to end."

"It is nothing of the kind! Romance, yes. But romance is

not lust. A dancer is interested in rhythm and color, a dancer conserves energy, she doesn't waste it on sex." She was so outraged that he dropped the subject, and she determined to forget it. The girl *was* full of fire, she pursued the handsome matador though it could cost her life. Mae played it to the hilt.

Hadn't she proved to Bob that he had no cause for jealousy? Jealousy was demeaning, Bob was too good a person, too intelligent to harbor it. If he glowered when she danced with others at parties, she refused to take notice.

In New York everyone went to the Sixty Club, where "outsiders" were not admitted; the dance floor was large, the atmosphere intimate. Actors' Equity sponsored a ball at the Astor for the Eastern Colony; she and Gloria Swanson were the centers of attention, men cut in every five steps on the dance floor. Marilyn Miller looked like a sunny flower in Jack Pickford's arms. They were together constantly now, and Marilyn was radiant for the first time since her husband Frank Carter's tragic death. But was Jack to be trusted? Mr. Ziegfeld didn't think so. He had called Mae one day and asked her to talk to Marilyn, to tell her the truth about Olive Thomas. And now, for all her pains, Marilyn wouldn't speak to her; she danced past coolly as if neither one of them had ever known a girl named Olive. A few weeks later, Marilyn married Jack in a gala wedding at Pickfair.

The dance merry whirl continued—theatre, opera, all the excitement Mae thrived on. But it seemed to weary Bob more and more.

When they returned home in the early hours, she'd say, "Come Bob, ride with me, we'll see the sunrise." But he was growing heavy; he didn't care for riding as he once did when they were at Tahoe and he'd leap from his horse to bring her a baby deer. So she rode alone on her own Black Beauty while night faded and morning sunlight streaked the skyscrapers. No matter what the weather, she'd ride full tilt through Central Park every day. It was part of the rhythm of New York, dancing, riding, sleeping, working—*Broadway Rose* a happy young

picture, *The French Doll*, in which she could imitate the beloved Bernhardt. Next would be an extravaganza, *Jazzmania*.

"We'll make this one in California," Bob said abruptly, not looking at her. "We'll need huge sets, great crowds of people. Metro's at our disposal."

"But our wonderful studio here! Can't we use miniatures for distance shots? Stage One is large enough."

"Don't you ever get lonesome for space and peace? Don't you tire of the crazy pace of this place?" His voice rose. Suddenly he was in a savage temper.

"I didn't know you missed California. If it means a great deal to you, Bob..."

"It means a *great* deal. Consider me for a change. We can make several pictures out there and then come back. *If* you can tear yourself away from the Sixty Club."

He had never used such a tone before. Where was his former gallantry? She walked away, into her own room, draped in the shimmering orchid taffeta she had brought from Europe. Once Vernon Castle had ushered her into Irene's dressing room and she had stood entranced. Now such a place was hers, but poor Vernon's life was a war casualty, and the adoration she had known was also a casualty. She became aware of Bob standing behind her.

"You know I love New York, Bob, and this apartment, and my horse, and our studio. Do you really want to go west so much, or is something else wrong?"

"I'm sick of Monte Blue! And Bob Frazer and Lowell Sherman and Rod La Rocque. I'm sick of their making love to you. I'd like to rip the love scenes out of every script!"

"Such scenes are important to the public. They're just part of our business and mean nothing more to me. After all, it's only make-believe romance, not real."

"Those fellows'd like to make it real. I know what's in their minds. I stand behind the cameras watching; and they drool, you hear me? Drool!" He picked up a negligee, flung it to the floor.

"You've been drinking, Bob."

"Not enough to affect my mind. You save everything you've got for the moment you're before those damned lights."

He seemed to swell, thicken, grow stout with fury.

"You don't know what love is!" he roared.

"If going to California will make you happy, Bob, let's go at once."

They crossed the country and moved into a bungalow at the Ambassador Hotel. Then they rented a large house on Adelaide Drive and set up housekeeping with four cats, a monkey named Jimmie, a leopard cub, a borzoi, a Saint Bernard, a Great Dane and an aviary. Meanwhile, sets were being built for *Jazzmania*. The leopard cub was to be her pet in the picture and there was a baby elephant she wanted to adopt, but Bob said what would she do with it when it grew up? So she let it go to Grauman's Egyptian Theater, where it was on exhibit in the patio and she could feed it peanuts.

They were too busy to see many people—and Bob didn't want to see them. They lived alone, took picnic lunches to the beach, drove miles along the ocean and tried to absorb what Bob called *peace*. "This is where we belong, this is where we were happy," he'd say.

They went to the American Legion fights on Friday nights and waved to the Harold Lloyds and the Tom Mixes, to Barbara LaMarr and Agnes Ayres, and stopped for a bite at Levy's on Hollywood Boulevard. They danced at the Cocoanut Grove and at the Biltmore, but usually they kept to themselves.

Hollywood had changed. There was far too much talk about the Arbuckle case. "Fatty" Arbuckle had been one of the participants in a party at a hotel in San Francisco where a girl named Virginia Rappe died after being raped. There had been two trials and another was forthcoming, but it was as if the whole of Hollywood faced trial. "Fatty's" pictures had been banned and nationally withdrawn; even the Arbuckle features he had written and directed for Joe Schenck, Paramount would not release. James Cruz, who had worked with "Fatty," had

put an awful scene into his picture *Hollywood* in which a girl is trying for a place in line at the casting window and is given a place by a polite fat man. When the man applies at the window it is slammed in his face, and on it appears the word *closed*. When he turns to the camera, he is "Fatty" Arbuckle.

There was too much talk about the unsolved murder of director William Desmond Taylor, implicating Mabel Normand and Mary Miles Minter. Gossip had it that Mary would never make another film. Mabel's career was also in jeopardy unless the case was solved, as she had left Taylor's house an hour before the murder. Both girls had been close to Taylor; there were implications of sex and dope in the headlines. Mae had sent word to Mabel through her attorney, asking if there was anything she could do. But no word had come back.

These cases made Hollywood sound like a modern Babylon. When Will Hays resigned as postmaster general in the Harding cabinet to head the Hays office, this new type of censorship was viewed as a sop to the financiers who backed movies, and a threat to all proponents of film artistry. It was as if the two scandals were the direct outcome of the movie world's growing sophistication, and its attempt to get something on the screen other than Pollyanna stories. In the public eye the whole population of Hollywood were fast people drinking bootleg whiskey and living deliriously. *Variety* heralded the advent of "Czar" Hays as "the biggest thing in the screen world since the close-up"; the headlines kept harping on the scandals. Just as Hays was trying to put the house in order, Wally Reid died of dope addiction.

Mae was horrified. The rumors about Wally had been true! It was hard to believe that handsome, gifted Wally Reid, who had so much to live for, had had the same compulsion as the pathetic addicts she had once seen in the prisons of New York.

Mae retreated into the world of production, which had no relationship whatever to the bizarre Hollywood suggested by lurid newspaper headlines.

The Metro lot hummed with activity. Auburn-haired Alice

Terry was on the lot making *Where the Pavement Ends* with handsome Ramón Novarro, Barbara LaMarr had just finished *The Prisoner of Zenda*. She had started as a dancer too and now had the quality of a dark-eyed swan. Eleanor Boardman was shooting *Three Wise Fools* and there was a newcomer in the picture, good-looking William Haines. Marion Davies was installed on the lot in an elaborate bungalow where she and Mr. Hearst held court. Marion was making *In Little Old New York*, one of the most lavish costume productions imaginable and in her cast were Louis Wolheim and Harrison Ford, both good actors from Broadway. Hearst spared no expense on Marion's pictures, they were beautifully mounted; and Bob spared no innovation, no opportunity for a dance in Mae's pictures, the queen of *Jazzmania* reviewed her troops to ragtime.

Mae thrived on the competition. Each actress dressed to the teeth and set a fashion pace of her own, *she* arrived daily at the studio in her Rolls Royce town car with its creamy body and black patent-leather collapsible top, with two men in cream and black uniforms sitting on the box. The lap rug was of sables; the interior of the tonneau, a soft yellow, was fitted with solid gold and cloisonné. She arrived completely made up, ready for the camera, her diamonds glittering wildly in the sun.

Fashion Row would be her greatest movie, she would play a dual role; the dark-haired rage of Broadway, Olga Farinova, who makes a society marriage by claiming royal blood, and the blonde peasant sister Zita, who comes from Russia to claim her. The script had passion, intrigue, murder, love, dramatic theatre scenes. Great sets with sky-high arches had been built for theatre sequences, hundreds of extras were brought in for the "audience." *The French Doll* had had one costume with fringe beaded in mirrors that cost \$1500. For Olga, Mae ordered a hand-beaded Russian dress and headdress that cost \$2700. And there was to be no double-exposure on the picture.

"It's old-fashioned, Bob. We can shoot a scene with the

camera on Olga, then dress someone in Olga's costume, have her back to the camera and photograph Zita."

"It would take forever," Bob argued.

"Perret let me do it that way in *Twin Pawns*. It's much better, less stiff and mechanical. Oh, and I want to be tall as the black one. I'm having some shoes built with platforms thirteen inches high."

"You'll fall on your face, Mae. You're trying the impossible."

Nothing was impossible. She practiced for three weeks, alone. She didn't sleep. She lay awake every night exploring the characters of Olga and Zita, working out their mannerisms, bits of business, thinking of ways to differentiate the two girls. This was a challenge, two utterly different characters and neither of them anywhere near her self. How about Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" for the orchestra prelude? "Deep River" for the overture? She must tell Bob.

The first time she tried the stilts on the set, she fell flat. Elmo Lincoln and Earle Fox picked her up and Bob was very solicitous, but he seemed to think this proved him right.

"Give up, dear. It's impossible."

She went back to practicing until it was not only possible but perfect, and when Bob saw the rushes he admitted it was the best thing she'd ever done. "As well as I know you, I can't believe Olga and Zita are both Mae."

They had just shot the scene where Olga confronts the man with the scar when she received word from Valentino. She found him waiting in her dressing room, white as the beads that draped him. He wore an Oriental costume for *The Young Rajah* with brocaded loincloth and beads falling in loops across his chest, legs and arms. He'd thrown a topcoat around him; his flesh looked gray under the tan. "Murray, look!" and he showed her the early edition of the *Examiner*. On page one was the picture of a distraught madonna. Blanca deSaulles had shot and killed her husband, playboy Jack. The caption read: "He would not give me my child."

"I've tried to reach her, Murray, she won't talk to me."

"Rudy, sit down. Blanca's right. How can she be associated with the famous sheik? That would only make things worse for her. Let me try to call, perhaps she'll talk to me."

They kept trying. During the ten days of Blanca's trial, Paramount thought Rudy was sick and shot around him, while at Metro he sat in Mae's dressing room where usually no one was allowed to intrude, burning candles and praying for Blanca. When the verdict declared her not guilty, he wept with relief. Half the women in the world were mad about Rudy, and he wept in Mae's arms for Blanca whom he could *not* have. The judge, in freeing Blanca said, "Mother love is not to be trifled with. It is the strongest of all emotions."

Mae tucked this sad episode away for possible future use in a picture where she might play a mother. Meanwhile, she played a Mexican siren in *Mademoiselle Midnight*; in *Circe*, wearing a bizarre gown of crystal baguettes, she personified the very essence of the jazz nymph. Vincent Blasco-Ibáñez, the Spanish author of *Blood and Sand* and *The Four Horsemen*, had written *Circe* for her and given her great dramatic contrasts. She could leap from a wistful child in pigtails to the petted darling of the rich to the unhappy woman beseeching attention from the one man who hated her willful ways.

Louis B. Mayer became head of the studio during the making of *Circe*. There was an impressive ceremony attended by the stars; soon after, Mayer invited Mae to lunch. It turned out to be the first sales meeting of the newly formed Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and she was introduced as "that vital and gorgeous creature who has saved the studio's life." Mae didn't know exactly what that meant. Before the merger, Metro had been in serious financial trouble, Mr. Mayer explained, like a good many studios after the 1921 slump. Her Tiffany productions, sold along with the regular Metro product in block booking, had kept the studio from bankruptcy. Now Loew and Schenck were absorbing Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, merging Goldwyn with Metro in the big Culver City plant owned by the Goldwyn company, and putting all production under

the supervision of himself and his associates. There was every reason to expect a prosperous future, he said, and something about the man carried conviction.

Louis B. Mayer, the son of Russian immigrants, had decided very early not to join his father in the scrap-metal business. Married at nineteen, he supported his wife and children by running a vaudeville-picture house in Haverhill, Massachusetts. He had become associated with the young Metro company in New York; his first move as a producer came when he'd lured Anita Stewart from Vitagraph and taken her west to make pictures. From the beginning, he showed a gift for assembling talent. He had brought to his small studio out on Mission Road good directors, fine writers, and such stars as Renée Adoree and Barbara LaMarr. He also brought as his production assistant from Universal a bright young man who had run Universal while Carl Laemmle was in Europe and was already tabbed the wonder-boy of the business, Irving Thalberg.

Mayer was a tough little man with an indomitable drive. He'd been hired to run MGM studio on an efficient and profitable basis and he intended to do so. With two working supervisors, Thalberg and Harry Rapf, whom he'd enticed way from Warners, he intended to turn out fifty films a year. He was a hard worker but he was also very sentimental and easily moved. He had talked at lunch about his first picture—*He Who Gets Slapped*, Andreyev's stark drama of a sensitive scientist who becomes a clown and dies defending the honor of a circus girl. Lon Chaney, so gruesome in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, would have a sympathetic role as the clown, the circus girl would be a newcomer Mayer had brought over from Mission Road, Norma Shearer. What intrigued Mae was Mayer's combination of hard-headed thinking and soft-hearted feeling. He told those salesmen a thing or two about MGM product and Tiffany productions and what Mae Murray meant at the box office; but he also had tears in his eyes as he talked of Lon Chaney as the clown.

She went back to the set in a happy haze to find Bob stomping about, furious because she was late. They were about to shoot the *Circe* party scene in which she'd lead her admirers to the punchbowl. A fifty-four piece Negro band is playing in the background, she takes a top hat and, in her lavish dress of crystals, does a strut. There should be reflections of the crystals in the pool, she told cameraman Ollie Marsh. She danced, and flirted with Billy Haines, the peppy, collegiate-looking boy who had scored with the public already and who made an excellent foil for Circe. Bob told her twice that she needed less intensity in the scene. At one point, he reached out a long stick, prodded Billy in the rear to startle him, and startled him so thoroughly that she *and* Billy both fell into the pool. In her crystal dress.

This was unforgivable, this fooling around on a set. The next day, something crashed into the middle of her scene with James Kirkwood, who played the doctor. She stepped out of the lights and saw Bob, walking rapidly off the set. He had smashed a spot, hit it with his bare fist. He didn't return to the set for three days, nor did he come home. It didn't occur to Mae that her love scenes were driving him crazy. With Ollie Marsh and the boys, she kept on until shooting was finished. Not a word of it leaked out, she felt sure.

After work the third day, Nick Schenck and Mr. Mayer called her to the office. Mr. Mayer was leaving for Italy with the *Ben Hur* company. Mr. Schenck was going back to New York.

"Your arrangement with the Detroit people is almost over," Nick said. "We want you to sign with us."

"We have wonderful plans for you," Mayer said. "We're going to be the studio of the stars and you can be one of the greatest."

"And Bob?"

"We're talking about *you*, Mae. We're talking about a two-year contract, seventy-five hundred a week."

"I couldn't sign without Bob. He mustn't be harmed."

"Think it over, Mae." Mr. Mayer gave her a pious smile but when he took her hand he conveyed an overwhelming sense of power.

Mae walked back slowly across the lot. She went into her dressing room and tried to think. These two years in California had been a strain. She remembered the afternoon they'd gone to Pickfair, the week ends they'd spent at the Hearst ranch, the party at the Schencks' when she danced with one of Joe's apprentices, young Jimmy Starr (later to become a noted columnist). She and Connie and Norma Talmadge had had such fun, while Bob had sulked in a corner. To be free was all she wanted, but for a long time her freedom had been in jeopardy. She'd promised Bob in Paris that she'd work with him. She wouldn't go back on that.

The dressing-room door banged open and Bob barged in. "I know what you're up to," he bellowed. "I saw you come out of Schenck's office."

She stared at him in dismay.

"You were going to work only with me. Now you're sneaking in to Schenck, giving him God knows what to wangle something on your own."

She shouted too. "Stop it, Bob. You don't know what you're saying. I just turned down a contract because it didn't *include* you."

She ran out of the dressing room and off the set. The next day she left for New York, opened the apartment, slept again in her orchid taffeta room. For a week, she saw no one, thought quietly, rode her horse through the park, listened to phonograph music. "Get back to simplicity," she told herself. "Wake up happy. Nothing fatigues the body or stales the mind like a blind, undernourished soul. Watch the birds. No one has mortgages on them!" And no one should have mortgages on her. Not even Bob. She had wanted their marriage to last forever, but Bob was out of harmony with her; and how could you work without harmony? One morning she awakened, hearing a door open. She looked down from her balcony and saw

him hunched in a chair, his anger all gone. He took the stairs two at a time, gasping for breath.

"I'm ashamed, Mae," and he looked at her as he had long ago when she was the plowgirl. "You don't understand how it is to love."

"Love is kindness, Bob, and complete trust."

"You don't really love me."

"Bob, we've reached the heights together, we've had wonderful years and we can have many more if you'll believe in me. Let's go together and see Nick Schenck. There's no question of *one* contract. I'd never sign unless they signed you too. Let's at least see what they have in mind."

So they went to see Schenck. What he had in mind was *The Merry Widow*.

"Why, I've been bidding for it!" she said.

"I know you have, dear, and we'd be much obliged if you'd stop boosting the price. But you were quite right about the Franz Lehar piece as a vehicle for you. She'll be a perfect 'Merry Widow,' Bob, and it's going to be a great production. Von Stroheim will direct; he has the European touch this needs."

"Why are you trying to separate us?" Bob said. "Why have you turned against me, Nick?"

"No one's turned against you, Bob. We want you to sign a contract; we promised Mae, we have plenty for you to do; but *The Merry Widow* is for Mae and Von Stroheim."

"Maybe Bob and I can make another picture before the year is out. Put that in our contracts."

They shook hands on that. Three days later, she sailed for Europe. She didn't even tell Nick Schenck or MGM. She was on her way to Vienna to see the original Merry Widow Waltz, to find the dancing master who had trained the operetta's *corps de ballet*.

Bob took her down to the ship and waved as it pulled away; she waved back absent-mindedly. She felt as free as a gull.

10



Erich Von Stroheim had burst upon the Hollywood scene like a rocket with a picture called *Blind Husbands*. He had been around for nine years before that, working as an extra, as technical consultant on such pictures as Griffith's *Hearts of the World*, and as the villainous German officer of innumerable war films. With the war ended, his uniform gathering dust, he finally persuaded Carl Laemmle of Universal to let him produce, direct and star in his own screen play. *Blind Husbands* considered with total honesty a wife's right to love, a husband's indifference, and permitted the lover to emerge a human being rather than a stereotyped villain. It was a step up in film-making and it was followed by *The Devil's Passkey*, *Foolish Wives*, *Merry-Go-Round*, and *Greed*, all melodramas of lust (lust for money, or for youth, or for love or debauchery), all presented with a brutally realistic viewpoint unusual on the screen. Von Stroheim was an intense individualist; he was also extravagant and uncontrollable. He spent \$200,000 on the Monte Carlo set for *Foolish Wives*, kept the cameras grinding for almost a year. It was at this point,

with Laemmle in Europe, that his path violently crossed Irving Thalberg's for the first time.

Irving had come west as Laemmle's secretary and found Universal in a state of chaos. The studio manager was constantly having to share authority with people sent out from New York, and whenever Laemmle came west he countermanded authority and tried to run the place himself. Three months after Thalberg had walked into the studio for the first time, Laemmle had gone off to Europe and left Thalberg, then twenty-one years old, in his stead. Irving had been a delicate boy; at seventeen he had almost died of rheumatic fever, but he had a tireless persistence and innate smartness. He brought order into the chaos at Universal and went to war with Von Stroheim, the *enfant terrible*. Eventually, the director's autocratic methods, ruinous production costs, and millions of feet of extraneous shots led to a breach with Universal. Moving on to Goldwyn, he tackled Frank Norris' novel *McTeague*, a relentless story of man's lust for gold which Von Stroheim filmed relentlessly in fifty reels. While it was being cut—not by the director: he refused to destroy his masterpiece—the merger of Goldwyn and Mayer took place, and again Thalberg and Von Stroheim clashed, this time when Thalberg refused to restore the eliminated footage. The picture was released as *Greed*. Von Stroheim never looked at it in its truncated version, and, despite its brilliant realism and unusual effects, the picture was a dismal box-office failure.

Now Von Stroheim's contract had been taken over by MGM; he was to go back on salary with *The Merry Widow*, starring Mae Murray. The assignment was not to his taste. He detested the star system and had never worked with stars, preferring unknowns whom he could mold to realistic performances; he felt all stars were mannered. He finally agreed, so that "my family shall not starve," but at once proceeded to plan the picture with a hard, cynical undertone. The Lehar operetta meant nothing to him. What mattered was the glittering decadence of continental aristocracy.

Mae knew nothing of all this. She had just returned from Vienna and was seated in Irving Thalberg's office, trying to adjust to the idea that this frail dark-haired boy was, in Mayer's absence, head of the studio, when in marched her new director, tucked his riding crop under his arm, and came to stiff attention. Erich Oswald Hans Carl Marie Stroheim von Nordenwald was the son of a colonel in the Sixth Regiment of Dragoons; his mother had been lady-in-waiting to the Empress of Austria; but to Mae he looked—oh dear Lord—exactly like the brutal Hun he played in war pictures! His stony face was bluntly chiseled, the head shaved to a harsh bristle. She couldn't look him in the eye; his monocle made an arrogant round glare over one eye and reduced the other to a pale gray point. The man was terrifying!

"Mr. Erich Von Stroheim," Irving said. "Miss Mae Murray." He smiled his quick boyish smile and Von Stroheim clicked his heels and shook her hand. He gave off the thin fierce scent of fetid leather.

"I have every faith in this picture," she said, trying to collect herself. "I've lived Sally in my heart, she is what I've been working toward all my life."

"It vass not much to begin wiss. We make it ausentic," he said.

She thanked God that *The Merry Widow* was gay and charming, that he couldn't possibly make it into a horrible downbeat thing like *Greed*.

"Everything must be perfect, yes. And I have found the ideal Prince Danilo right here on the lot! John Gilbert," she said.

Something flashed between the schoolboy and the general.

"*Norman Kerry*," Irving said. "Roy D'Arcy will play Crown Prince Mirko and Norman Kerry, Danilo."

Von Stroheim bridled. Later she learned that he'd wanted to play Mirko himself.

"Oh no, not Norman Kerry. I've nothing against him but," she pouted her lips appealingly, "we must have that dashing impetuous Gilbert. Did you see *His Hour*? He has the bearing,

the fiery eyes, the flashing teeth. Can't you just see him dancing with Sally, the famous Merry Widow Waltz?"

The riding crop whipped the side of Thalberg's desk. The monocle leaped right out of Von Stroheim's eye.

"*Valtz?* There vil be no waltz. This iss not musical comedy."

"Mr. Von Stroheim, a dance can be highly dramatic, a lyrical moment no one will ever forget."

"Ve deal with social significance, Miss Murray, with European decadence. Der vil be no waltz while I am di-recting zis picture."

Thalberg sat hunched behind the wall of his desk, but he spoke with authority.

"Listen to Von Stroheim, Mae. He knows what he's doing. He says no waltz, it's no waltz."

"I have been to Vienna," she said quietly. "I have seen the original dancing master, I have hired an instructor for John Gilbert."

"Nonsense," hissed Von Stroheim, rigid with fury. "I used Norman Kerry in *Merry-Go-Round*. He iss excellent. The picture made a star of Mary Philbin."

"I already am a star. You know that I am the top box office this studio has," she said, to Thalberg, for Von Stroheim had marched past her and slammed the door.

"Von Stroheim brooks no interference," Thalberg said. "He is a genius."

"Not to me. I think *Greed* is a horrible picture. Not a moment of beauty in it; heavy, hopeless and it didn't make you a cent at the box office. But that's not the point..."

"He won't have Gilbert, and he won't have the waltz. Forget it, Mae. As far as Gilbert goes, it's just as well. You'd have your hands full. He's a wild boy."

She was trembling but she stood up, straight as Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon* and in just such a sonorous voice said, "Perhaps you should re-read my contract, Irving."

A week later in the same office, "Prince Danilo" in sports clothes, his black hair touseled, rose to meet her.

"This is the lady who has fought for you," Irving said.

Gilbert smiled uneasily. He'd been coming along in pictures, but he'd never played opposite a top star.

"You must let your moustache grow, the way it was in *His Hour*. Oh, I've looked at many pictures, at every handsome dark man in this business but you *are* Prince Danilo just as I am Sally O'Hara of the Manhattan Follies who becomes the fabulous widow."

He listened raptly, his dark eyes smoldering. From his work Mae knew that he was sensitive—hypersensitive. She guessed that his wildness came from a deep need to overcome his shyness and insecurity.

"We must understand each other, John," she said. "We will have no tricks. This is our love story. The public will know whether we're buddies or not."

"I'm not much of a dancer," he said. "Perhaps if you would teach me..."

"I have hired a dance instructor to tutor you in the waltz. You will dance with me when you become adroit." Then seriously she begged him not to let her down, to believe in her as she believed in him. "We must give this picture the best of ourselves."

Next day she received four dozen long-stemmed roses. His note said, "I will have no trouble giving my best. I will adore you. Jack."

He picked her up at the dressmaker's and she showed him the magnificent black satin-velvet gown the widow would wear. Very décolleté, it would hang from diamond strands caught in a necklace about her throat. Mae had found a young man in New York who dreamed of being a designer, a talented young Syrian named Adrian. Into his hands she'd entrusted the bewitching clothes.

The designs had just arrived, she tried to show Jack the sketches. He looked at her instead.

"No, look. Can you imagine this headdress all of birds of paradise? How dramatic when you bend me back."

"Let's practice," he said, catching her about the waist.

She eluded him gently, gave the dressmakers final instructions and they left. Not one detail was unimportant, even the cheap silk stockings this girl wears when she first comes to Europe.

"There's a shot—remember, Jack?—her legs emerging from the stage coach, leaping over the pile of luggage. And the kimono she wears when you force your way into her room at the inn. She's so fresh and innocent, this Sally O'Hara. And when she finds you're a prince!"

He absorbed every word as they drove along through the pale twilight. He had never heard anyone so intent on work. A very jolly moon had risen, grinning like a jack-o'-lantern it sailed along above them in the pale sky. Jack drove to a summit where they could look down on the sea and hear the steady *shush-shush*.

"You must not be disappointed if Von Stroheim proves difficult. Don't allow him to pierce your armor. You're vulnerable, Jack. You want everyone to love you."

He reached out and drew her closer. How did she know?

"I know. I've heard about you and Leatrice Joy and how you've tried to forget her with all kinds of women."

He dropped her arm. "I'm unlucky. Two marriages and neither of them has worked. I have to forget."

"These women aren't worthy of you. You're going to need all your energy for our work. You've got to desist from cheap women. Promise me. If I thought you were doing these things, carelessly kissing these . . . these people, *I* couldn't kiss you."

He gave her a dark, searching look. "I promise you, my darling Mae. I will keep the kisses for you." Before she could stop him, his mouth was on hers.

"Save it for the picture," she said, pushing him away. "We want all the fire of first passion. We want to look truly in love."

"We'll do better than that. We'll be in love." His hands were urgent.

"We are artists, Jack, we work with illusions. Believe me, we can convince them without . . ."

"To hell with the audience, think of me, *I* want to be con-

vinced. And you have no ties. I know about you and Leonard."

"Don't make my life any more difficult, Jack. We're friends already, we will work closely and well. Don't spoil it."

With the roses, next day, came this note: "Let me fall in love with you! Then I'll no longer be—Bad Boy Jack."

How did he know about her and Bob? They were still sharing a house, going through the outward forms.

"I know about women, darling Mae."

"If you do, then know I want you to behave—off screen."

There were American Beauties every day, and one day a basket of hard-boiled eggs because she hadn't relented. The notes always said "Am I behaving?"

He was behaving magnificently, before the cameras. There was the scene where he tries to seduce Sally, assuming that she'll take it as a matter of course, then discovers her innocence; and later, after he has thwarted the evil crown prince, Sally kisses him. Jack took her in his arms with all the passion you could ask. She leaned against the door, shaken.

"Let me know when this iss over," Von Stroheim hissed, walking away.

He'd hated her from the first day. She had stood up to him for Gilbert and had her way. Von Stroheim made it clear he despised them both. He devoted himself to his protégé, Roy D'Arcy, whom he had taught to walk like Von Stroheim, leer like Von Stroheim, talk like Von Stroheim, and who buttered up the master in a mincing manner that she and Jack imitated behind their backs. It was a strange world, the domain of Von Stroheim. He had hundreds of extras on the set; all his pals, who worked on all his pictures and his lieutenants, Eddie Sowders and Louis Germonprez, and their lieutenants. This clique stood about while Von Stroheim devoted himself to details he considered important. Of course, Germonprez was his brother-in-law. Impossible as it was to imagine, someone was married to Von Stroheim. Her name was Valerie Germonprez and she had a baby. Maybe he was different at home; no one knew anything about Von Stroheim at home. On the set he

was a dictator. They waited twenty hours for a dog to sneeze in a long shot. Four extras fainted. Mae walked off the set.

He spent days in sweat shirt and pants training the soldiers of Montebianco to Viennese precision, shouting, stinging them with his irony, until they became the military he wished. But when Mae did a scene, he'd walk away, he refused to allow her a single close-up.

She spoke to Thalberg.

"Mae, try to cooperate with Von Stroheim," he said. "We have a costly picture. Let's not delay it."

"You should speak to *him* about delays. He did a scene today so lewd Hays would never let it be printed on the screen!" A scene in which lecherous old Baron Sadoja was kissing and slobbering over her bare feet. She'd stood it as long as she could and then fainted. Ollie Marsh and the boys had had to pick her up and carry her to her dressing room.

"The old man has a fetish about feet," Von Stroheim said. "Did you sink we were playing with cream-puff pastry? We are concerned wiz psychological implications."

One free day when they'd been shooting without her, she came back to the studio to see rushes and saw the most lurid scenes: degenerate parties, orgies, a scene in the boudoir of King Niketa and Queen Melina with chamber pots under the beds; the Queen with plasters on her face, fixing her *feet*; royal women with hair on their faces and chin supporters. Sitting there in the dark, surrounded by this insanity, she could smell Von Stroheim, the acrid leather smell, and suddenly she ran screaming from the room.

"This is filth," she told Thalberg. "Kissing people's bottoms and kissing feet, the old man behaving obscenely with a closet full of shoes!"

"Von Stroheim has to purge himself," Thalberg said. "The man's a genius. He's giving the picture dimension."

"Degeneracy's what he's giving it. And you're letting him."

"You'll never see eye to eye with Von Stroheim. You want

everything a fairy-tale fantasy, Mae. This is a lecherous old man you marry. Didn't you understand?"

She bit her lip and walked away. They wanted her to quit, she could feel it. Thalberg was caustic and abrupt, and Von Stroheim drove her relentlessly. "I know what I'm doing," he shouted. "You are a self-conscious and mannered actress. I yell at you, I hammer until we knock away all that conceals your real capacity for feeling. We want no cutey-cute mouth, Miss Murray. Now, once more." The set was supposed to be closed but several times she saw Norma Shearer watching. Norma had played the ingénue in *He Who Gets Slapped*; now she was looking for bigger things. She was dating Irving Thalberg and everyone knew she was an ambitious girl.

Irving sent for Mae. "Von Stroheim tells me you're hard to handle. What's wrong now, Mae?"

"He's an insolent, overbearing man, that's what's the matter. But this is my picture and you can't get me angry enough to give it up. Not even for Norma Shearer."

Von Stroheim would not shoot a close-up. They had come to the scene where Sally realizes she's trapped, that she'll never marry the prince, and Baron Sadoja suggests that she can get even with all these people by marrying him. She is lying on the floor at his feet, her wedding clothes practically torn off, the tears are still on her face, but what he says gets through to her, she makes up her mind.

"Ollie," she said. "Will you come back here and work with me tonight? We must have close-ups. How else could you ever *see* what is in this girl's heart?"

"I'll work with you gladly, Murray, but your friend has had these sets built without any apertures for lights."

"I'll get a carpenter," she said.

"Better get two."

They met at eleven, hurried down dark, silent streets onto the set and worked until dawn. Carpenters sawed holes in the walls and in the floor, Ollie put up his baby spots, and the camera peered closely at Sally O'Hara who had lost her love but found revenge. They agreed to work as many nights as

need be until they had close-ups to match all the scenes of the picture. Let Von Stroheim concentrate on mad revels and shoes and a dog sneezing.

Next morning, the enemy came striding up to her with an ugly scowl, slapping his whip against his leg.

"I suppose I haf you to thank for ruining this set, Madame!"

"You're not going to use it again. You finished with it yesterday, Mr. Von Stroheim." To Irving Thalberg, she said, "I'm weary of fighting every step of the way. I'm giving everything I have to this picture."

"Who does she sink she iss?" roared Von Stroheim.

She sent telegrams to New York every night—to Nick Schenck, to Mayer's men, Rubin and Moskowitz: YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. YOU WOULDN'T ALLOW IT. SOMEONE SHOULD BE OUT HERE. She kept fighting. This was the picture she wanted to be synonymous with her as *Le Misanthrope* was synonymous with Cécile Sorel. She'd have given anything in the world for someone to help her. She seldom saw Bob. They came and went their own ways.

"I hear you're having it rough," he did say one day when they met on the stairs.

"The Garden of Gethsemane." She hoped against hope that he'd want to give her advice. But the next day, playing a love scene with Gilbert, she became aware of Bob glaring at her from behind a flat. He knew what was going on, he'd been sneaking and snooping! It was a scene where Jack was supposed to be unconscious, but when she put her lips to his, he kissed her very soundly. Von Stroheim turned his back. Jack spoiled three takes. He opened his long-lashed eyes and implored her not to hurt him.

"Jack, aren't we buddies?" she whispered. "This picture will mean everything in the world to us. Do it right."

At home that night there was a note from Bob. "I can see how completely objective you are about your new screen lover." She was exhausted and she didn't dare cry; she needed to rest, to sleep, to be ready for another day.

John Barrymore finished with *The Sea Beast* at Warners,

dropped by the set to tell her he was her devoted admirer. Greta Garbo came by to watch her fit clothes. Greta had not yet made a picture, what she saw of the studio frightened her. "Where do you get the energy, my friend, the pep? I could not stand like that, they will have to fit mine on a figure."

"I rest in my dressing room on wheels. It is my refuge, and I need it, Greta. On this picture, I need any peace I can find."

For the bridle-path scene, they moved to Griffith Park. It is the moment when she rides out with entourage and finds Danilo lying unconscious. As they rehearsed, she coached the groom how to leap from his horse, how to help her dismount. Von Stroheim called for action and the entourage came up the path. There lies Gilbert, the groom dismounts and catches her as she alights.

"*Cut.*" Von Stroheim strode up to the trembling groom. "Precisely, who told you to do *that*?"

"Miss Murray suggested."

"I want the reins tossed over the horse's head! And who is directing this picture, Miss Murray?"

"You are directing and I am the star. I have lived in Europe, ridden in Europe. No lady would alight unassisted from a horse."

"Indeed, the lady has lived in Europe. So haff I. The reins should be tossed over the horse's head!"

"Not by me, Mr. Von Stroheim."

The monocle flipped from his eye, the tight coat almost burst across his chest. "Who do you sink you *are*?" he said.

"The queen of MGM."

If it sounded arrogant, let it. She had to keep her pride and not let him destroy her. She had to meet *his* arrogance somehow, pull in the reins and not let him go any further. But the answer excited him almost to apoplexy. They went back to the studio with a day wasted.

Thalberg was furious; so was Mr. Mayer, who'd returned from Rome, and thank goodness he had returned, maybe he could understand actors and their viewpoint. That night, a

research man was sent to the library to check, the next day they went to Griffith Park again and she dropped her reins for the groom. *Not* over the horse's head.

It was time for the Embassy scenes. Von Stroheim shot her entrance, her meeting with the ambassadors, nothing was being done to set up the big scene for the waltz. He would not discuss it. "Waltz? I told you in the beginning, no waltz."

There was nothing to do but go home. She stayed close to the phone each morning, waiting for a call, all dressed, in make-up, ready. When nothing happened, she'd go out, walking or riding. On the fourth day, Mr. Mayer phoned.

"Are you in costume, Mae? Good, I thought you might be. We're workers, you and I. Because I have dreamed of this picture, you wouldn't want to hurt me."

She went to his office, in costume. "You people haven't minded hurting me. You've put me in the hands of someone who is trying to ruin me *and* the picture."

"But, you understand our problem, we have a staggering investment. Be a good girl, Mae."

"When it's agreed we do the waltz."

"You're making a big thing out of that waltz."

"It is the heart of the picture."

"Von Stroheim says no and he's the best in the business."

"You know that *Greed* did not make a cent for this studio. And you know what I've made for the studio. This picture should be full of romance and sparkle. And he's making it something lewd and depraved; if he has his way perversion will totally drown out the gaiety and drama."

Mr. Mayer flushed. "And if the waltz is set up properly?"

"With a path to the star so they can see us, so the dance won't be lost in the extras? Yes, if everything is right, Mr. Mayer, I will be on the set tomorrow morning ready for work. It's where I want to be. It's my life."

"You're a seductive siren, Mae. You probably drive old Erich crazy."

Overnight he phoned the papers and told them work would

resume next day. "I've spanked little Mae and put her in her corner, she's coming back to work," he said. One of the Hearst reporters phoned her to verify it.

"You be on the set tomorrow morning," she told the reporter. "You needn't say who you are, just stay outside my dressing room, I have something for you to hear." She asked Mr. Mayer to visit the set.

"Mr. Mayer, you have never spanked me and neither has anyone else. You must call the papers and explain you didn't mean that. You know you didn't spank me, how dare you say such a thing."

"All right, all right, I'll phone the *Times*!"

But the Hearst reporter was already on the phone.

"Little one, you make a big fuss," Mayer said, coming closer, peering through his horn-rimmed glasses like a persistent goblin. "I admire you even if you're not diplomatic, Mae. We could be close friends, you and I."

"I don't know what you mean," she said, stepping lightly to her feet. "Please, Mr. Mayer, let's not hold up production. I'm wanted on the set."

So now it was to be her way, they were to film the waltz through a crowd of a thousand extras, while she and Jack came closer and closer to the camera and he bent her back in a low glide. He was very dapper in his white-skirted uniform, very nervous, very warm. He kept wiping his glistening moustache.

"I wish I were in South America," he whispered. "At least Mexico."

"Oh no, you don't. You want only to be in Monteblanco and that is where you are. And you haven't seen me for a long while and I have changed, the child Sally is a dazzling woman and you walk up to her, take her away from the Crown Prince, take her in your arms..."

At that moment the band struck up the waltz. From Von Stroheim's platform far down the great ballroom came the signal to start. Jack's hand was shaking against her bare waist, he whirled her through the throng of dancers, and now the



CLIVER SERVICE

Irving Thalberg, Hollywood boy wonder, was production chief at M-G-M studios when Mae's film *The Merry Widow* was made.

Rudolph Valentino and Vilma Banky in *Son of the Sheik*. Mae went on dates with Rudy when he was unknown Broadway dancer and got him first screen role in her movie *Delicious Little Devil*.

As Queen of *Jazzmania*, a mythical kingdom devoted to music, dancing, and gaiety, Mae entertains guests at sumptuous palace ball. With two tiny blackamoors she performs a graceful "court dance."

M-G-M





M-G-M

John Gilbert and Mae dance famous waltz at the Embassy ball in *The Merry Widow*.

Mae journeyed to Vienna to see original waltz in Lehar operetta, made it the rage of America.

John Gilbert as Prince Danilo and Mae Murray as Sonia appear in sultry love scene in *The Merry Widow*. Later Gilbert walked off the lot during feud with director Erich von Stroheim.



CULVER SERVICE

Nicholas Schenck, head of M-G-M and Loew Theatres, distributed Mae and Bob Leonard's Tiffany films.



M-G-M



M-G-M

As wealthy widow, Mae wore lavish beaded gown, tiara, and jewels, carried extravagant ostrich fan.



Sketch for *Merry Widow* gown, designed by talented young Syrian named Adrian.

Mae Murray, Erich von Stroheim, and John Gilbert rehearse scene for *The Merry Widow*. Most memorable film of Mae's career, it played sixteen months on Broadway, broke attendance records, and started waltz craze around the world.



M-G-M



M-G-M

Mae and Rudolph Valentino at performance of *The Merry Widow* just before her departure for Europe. Later they met in Europe, danced together in Paris, and were lionized wherever they appeared.

In boudoir scene of *The Merry Widow* Mae wore lace and ermine negligee on night of wedding to elderly millionaire. During shooting of this scene hundreds of fresh gardenias were used daily at great cost.



M-G-M

path was clearing, they dipped, swayed, moved in beautiful rhythm, his eyes never leaving hers, his lips murmuring "Oh you beautiful witch, oh you beautiful..." He stumbled!

"Cut!" Von Stroheim bellowed through his megaphone, "Louse-y, just as I knew it would be. The show girl and the amateur, the rank amateur."

She whirled and ran, straight down the room in her velvet ball gown, her paradise plumes bristling. She ran all the way to where he stood and began pounding with her fists against his tightly jacketed chest.

"Hun," she cried, "you dirty Hun!"

His face wobbled and swam before her, hundreds of others faces, his extras, swam around to protect him. Ollie Marsh and their chief electrician seized her wrist and took her to her dressing room, where they gave her into Adele's care.

"If I were a man I would break him in two," she sobbed—and a moment later, "Forgive me, Adele, I must not." She stopped crying abruptly, unhooked her dress and while Adele held it, stepped out, out of the dainty panties which were always sewn in. At that moment the phone rang. The gateman was calling. He had a message from Mr. Gilbert. Mr. Gilbert had left for South America. Mr. Gilbert said forgive him and good-by.

She ran out of the dressing room, off the set, down the street out across Washington Boulevard, in her diamond buckled shoes and paradise topnot, not knowing she was naked, faster than she'd ever run in her life. He kept his car in the parking lot, he was opening the car door.

"Jack!" she screamed, rushing up to him, throwing herself on him. "Come back, please come back."

He didn't answer, he threw his suitcase in the car and tried to free himself. She clung to him with all her strength, her fingers clutching the cloth of his coat. He tried to shake free. She bit and held on to the cloth with her teeth.

"What the hell's going on here," yelled a policeman. "Lady, look here, you can't run around this way."

"Good God, she's naked."

"Mae Murray. The star, without a stitch on."

"Madame will take cold," cried Adele.

There was a babble of voices, something rough was wrapped around her, a studio policeman had Jack by the arm.

"Now, Miss Murray," the policeman said. "What's it all about?"

"Mr. Gilbert must come with me, it's life or death."

"Better go along with Miss Murray and see what she wants," the policeman said.

So back they went across Washington Boulevard, Mae wrapped in a dirty blanket. It didn't matter. She clung to Jack and he clung to her, and finally they were by themselves in his dressing room with the door locked.

"My God," Jack moaned. "The man's inhuman."

"But you're not hurting *him* by running away. You're hurting me, Jack. I wanted this to be our picture, yours just as much as mine. And now, just when we've almost achieved it, after all the fighting I've done. How could you desert me?"

"Women humiliate me. I told you I couldn't dance."

"You dance and you dance beautifully. All that needs still to be done are the close shots. They can cut the last few feet, or we can do it again. I would dance with you before the world, Jack. I would never hurt you."

It went on for hours. Adele came once, knocked on the door and handed in coffee and sandwiches. Jack was adamant. He would not go back.

"All right," she said finally. "I was mistaken in you. I'm sorry to be disappointed."

"You're that way too? That's how I feel about people," he cried, grabbing her hand. "I'll not disappoint you, Mae. I've been hurt too often myself. It'll be all right. Don't worry. Try to understand. I need something to hang onto."

She gave him her hand, realized it wasn't enough, took his disheveled head and kissed it as if he were a child. "You won't be sorry. You'll never be sorry, Jack." And still clutching the dirty blanket, she went to her own dressing room.

Mr. Mayer was waiting for her. The studio, it appeared, was in an uproar. Von Stroheim's extras had marched on the front office. The grips and electricians, loyal to Mae, had marched on the front office, riot was imminent, something had to be done at once.

"Von Stroheim will have to apologize," she said. "To me and to Jack. Then we can tell the men all is well and they can report tomorrow as usual."

"You're talking like a child."

An hour later, Von Stroheim appeared in her room, dropped to one knee and kissed her hand. "If I haf offended you, allow me," he said. "I hope we can continue and complete zis picture."

But the breach never healed. Each day's work was a duel of wills; with three weeks still to go the battle of the close-ups reached a new high. She and Ollie were shooting every night, cutting holes in the scenery. Von Stroheim flipped his monocle, marched to the front office to complain and never came back. He and Thalberg had clashed for the last time.

They finished the picture without him, without any director, since his extras would not tolerate a substitute. Mae had presumably won. But what would eventually emerge as *The Merry Widow*? Von Stroheim had shot a total of *ninety* reels. Who would ever cut it to ten or twelve? And how would they cut it? As nearly as she knew there were two pictures, the one she had made, a love story with close-ups to show the development of character, and the story he had made, a grim ironic epic of debauchery in a Balkan kingdom. She had put forth her greatest effort, reached as far as she could reach; she only hoped that some day the public would see her Merry Widow.

11



If Bob had made a move to stop her, asked her not to close their house, followed her to New York, Mae would have resumed their marriage. She was terribly depleted from the long ordeal with Von Stroheim. But Bob was worn out too, from the ordeal of marriage to a siren who didn't respond to him. She wasn't frigid, he was sure of that, and the idea that some other man might one day rouse her from this Sleeping-Beauty trance was a constant torment; but he'd had enough of standing behind the camera while Mae held the John Gilberts of the world in her arms.

In New York, Mae planned to book passage immediately for Europe. In Paris she could get a quick divorce without publicity; she could renew and refresh herself, and forget *The Merry Widow*. It seemed strange to be suddenly free, without a challenge; and of course a new challenge appeared almost at once. As she crossed the lobby of the Ambassador, she was approached by three stocky foreign gentlemen in derby hats. They doffed the derbies, bowed; it was like a vaudeville act.

"Miss Mae Murray," they chorused, and the shortest said, in perfect English, "We represent Universum-Film-Aktiengesell-

schaft of Germany. You know it as Ufa?" He pronounced it "oofa."

Mae knew about "oofa." German films had achieved a high degree of art in the hands of Reinhardt and Pommer, Veidt, Krauss and Murnau. What Murnau had done with only one subtitle in *The Last Laugh!* Mae had been fascinated by the fluid manner with which the Germans used the camera as a piercing eye that could see inside the players. It was exactly what she had always tried for, why she had fought for close-ups. In German productions, skillful dissolves, multiple exposures, arresting angles and expert pantomime made subtitles virtually unnecessary. In *The Last Laugh* the facile camera had followed Emil Jannings through a performance which made him promptly the most talked-of actor in the world. American producers were trying to entice him as they had already enticed director Ernst Lubitsch, actress Pola Negri, writer Hans Kraly and director Dmitri Buchowetsky. Hollywood was having an epidemic of enthusiasm for German films and German methods.

The three little men from Ufa had an enthusiasm of their own, however. They were in America for one reason: to sign Mae Murray and bring *her* to Berlin. They were surprised to find her here at their very hotel. When could they discuss business? Tomorrow?

"I'm sorry, it's quite impossible, I sail for Europe tomorrow."

"On what boat?" they asked, and promptly booked passage on the same liner.

During the crossing they pressed their offer. They escorted her to lunch and dinner. At lunch the first day, they offered her a three-year contract. By dinner-time the terms had skyrocketed unbelievably. Money seemed no object in Germany, the government had grouped the leading German studios together in Ufa, they had then proceeded to subsidize film production for morale and propaganda purposes, and continued their support because pictures had proved a valuable export commodity. Behind the government was the Deutsche Bank.

"You are the sparkle of Europe," Herr Leni said. It was all very flattering. She promised to visit Berlin, and after she had secured her divorce in Paris she kept her promise. It was the gracious thing to do even if she had no idea of signing. But when the Blue Train pulled into Berlin, she discovered practically the whole city had turned out in welcome. There was a parade, a brass band, she rode in an open car, cool in her sheer gray suit, but warmed by the flowers, the bravos, the waving hands and friendly faces. A twelve-room suite awaited her at the Hotel Adlon—and two attendants, one to care for her clothes, one to translate her slightest wish. There was a party at the studio, Emil Jannings and Ufa's head, Eric Pommer, introduced her to the directors of the studio and to the directors of the Deutsche Bank, Mrs. Jannings acting as interpreter. They knew every picture she'd made, admired the mythological quality of her prologues. For a week she whirled from studio to studio, toured public monuments, was guest of honor at dinners and banquets, the reigning favorite in a world well-coordinated and with a rich tradition. All was protocol, esteem and honor.

When she mentioned wanting her own photographer, they said of course, and since Ollie Marsh was under contract to MGM (Greta Garbo had asked for him) Mae cabled and secured Charlie Rosher. After the contract was signed, Ufa presented her with a gift bonus of seventy-five thousand dollars.

It was the signal for a vacation. She visited the Greek theatre at Verona and the Acropolis by moonlight. In Italy, Rex Ingram was shooting *Mare Nostrum*. He had walked out of Metro when it became MGM. Rex was very independent after *The Four Horsemen*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and *Scaramouche*. He felt that big companies curtailed the director's authority so he was living and working now on the Riviera, making pictures with money put up by Schenck and Loew, and starring his wife, Alice Terry. Mae visited their seaside location. They spoke of Rudy Valentino; Alice had been his leading lady in *The Four Horsemen* and then in *Eugénie Grandet*. He had

sent Alice a picture postcard when he and Natasha Rambova were in Spain; the picture was of Rudy and a goat and on it he'd written "The one with the whiskers is not me." Like everyone who knew Rudy, Alice and Rex were deeply fond of him and worried about him. He wanted so to be in love and be happy and, ironically, love seemed to elude the great lover.

At a party at Pauline Frederick's he'd met actress Jean Acker. They'd been married that night and separated the same night, but Jean didn't file suit for divorce for a long while. When she did, she stated that the marriage had not been consummated. Meanwhile, working with Nazimova in *Camille*, Rudy met Natasha Rambova (she had changed her name from Winifred Hudnut when she went into show business). Natasha was Nazimova's art director, a beautiful, tall, blue-eyed girl with black hair and white skin, reminiscent of Blanca's. Rudy adored her cool mystic personality and swept her off to Mexicali, where they were married. In the middle of the honeymoon, he was arrested for bigamy and there was nothing to do but send his bride east until the Acker divorce became final.

Now more trouble was brewing. Natasha had taken over Rudy's business management and was at war with his new studio, United Artists. She was an artistic and ambitious girl; she'd started her battle with his former studio, Paramount, over *Blood and Sand*—which she said was obviously Hoboken, not Spain, appallingly directed, and with a heroine (Nita Naldi) far too fat. What she particularly disliked was that the hero only appeared in the last half of the picture. It was true, the studio had run Rudy through picture after picture without serious production values, cleaning up at the box office, and paying Rudy the same money they'd paid him before *The Sheik*. Because of Natasha, he'd broken with Paramount and hadn't appeared in a picture in two years. With Natasha he had been making personal appearance tours for Mineralava, a mud pack advertised in all the magazines with Rudy's endorsement: "I would not be without it."

Rudy was much in her thoughts now, for Mae had sailed from Italy to Algeria and the son of a leading sheik had escorted her and fourteen friends to the desert, where they were living the Arabian nights. They dined and danced through the long nights and slept through the days in silken tents, more lavish than any in Rudy's picture. Often she lay in the gray-gold noon light and considered the cost of celebrity, its slings and arrows. They called Rudy a powder-puff man and called her hard to handle. "Why?" she'd once asked Los Angeles newspaperman Harry Carr. "Why do they do it?" And Harry had said, "They don't sling mud at a Ford, Mae. Think it over."

Of course, the important thing was to make the kind of pictures you wanted, and have them ring true, no matter what was said. Chaplin allowed no interference; that's why he could turn out a *Gold Rush*; Doug Fairbanks brooked none, and he could produce a *Don Q*. She refused to think of her own beloved picture. If, riding in the sultry desert, she suddenly saw Danilo lying on the path, or heard on the wind the strains of her waltz, she put the thought away. She alone cared for the Widow and she had done all she could.

They were at a cabaret in Tunis when the cable reached her:

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN YOUR FIGHT FOR THE MERRY WIDOW
STOP I HAVE NOW SPENT THREE MONTHS CUTTING STOP PLEASE
COME BACK AND SEE WHAT I HAVE DONE STOP HONOR ME BY
COMING

It was signed Wid Gunning. Who in the world was he? She took the first boat home, the first train west, her car at once to MGM.

Wid Gunning was a writer and editor who had graduated from reporter on the papers in Chillicothe, Ohio, to theatre owner, to editor for Warner's Features and producer of *The Miracle Man*. At this time he was publishing the authoritative sheet on motion-picture production, *Wid's Weekly*, and he had volunteered to cut the Von Stroheim opus which he'd followed, via his weekly, through its long production war.

He was waiting for Mae in front of projection room B, an

affable man of medium height. She scarcely saw him, but she heard the warmth in his voice.

"Hurry, hurry, we can talk later," she said, running into the little room, dropping into the first seat, her pulse thudding, to see at last this love story she'd fought for. Gay, romantic, it was glorious from beginning to end, all debauchery gone, just the subtler touches to indicate the powers of evil threatening little Sally O'Hara of the Manhattan Follies. Certainly it was the most sophisticated love story she had ever seen, and Jack was irresistible, just as she'd known he'd be, and that vital creature in his arms, she *was* an actress. She started to cry halfway through. When the final close-up was over, in color of course, and her own blue eyes looked out serenely from the screen, Mae sobbed for joy.

"Wid Gunning! What a labor of love. How did you ever do it?"

It was a pretty major job of film doctoring, he said. He'd all but gone crazy running that stuff over and over, every foot of those ninety reels. Her close-ups had given him the clue: there were literally two different pictures. He'd stuck with hers.

Now she could go on to new work in Europe with a feeling of triumph, she thought, but MGM stepped in. She had another picture to make for them, had she forgotten? No, she could not get out of it. They kept offering her a new contract, even when she explained she had signed with Ufa. They wouldn't believe it. Their terms went up.

"But I've signed with Ufa!" she repeated again for Nick Schenck when he phoned from New York.

Bob Leonard stopped her on the lot. It was the first time they'd met since the divorce. "You must stay with MGM, Mae. The front office is at your feet for *The Merry Widow*. You're their top star."

"Your advice, Bob? Or did the front office send you?"

He didn't answer that.

Work started on *The Masked Bride*. Neither Thalberg nor

Mayer came down to the set; they were angry about Ufa. Basil Rathbone was a handsome leading man and, as the gamin who becomes the toast of Paris night life, Mae had a pleasant part. But there was no elation. It was the end of something and she was eager for a new beginning.

By the time she arrived in New York, *The Merry Widow* was the toast of the town, as it was across the country and in Europe. Business at the Embassy at road-show prices was so overwhelming mounted police had to control the crowds. Cut-outs of her and Gilbert dancing were silhouetted in lights over Broadway, silhouetted in giant figures against the daytime sky, loomed large in every paper. Everywhere you heard the strains of the Merry Widow Waltz. It sounded a lovely farewell note. She booked her passage, arranged her affairs, and everywhere she went, there was her face and her song. She ran into a number of old friends, into Hearst columnist Louella Parsons. Louella phoned the next day. There was to be a large gathering at Mr. Hearst's that night, for *Mae*. Seven o'clock.

Mr. Hearst had always been her friend. Why, then, should there be this sense of something ominous brewing? He was the same man, just more powerful; he owned newspapers now in every section of the country. She dressed in her loveliest embroidered chiffon and her white fox coat with the full skirt. Once when she was a kid Hearst had paid her \$2500 for dancing at a party; and out at San Simeon she and Bob had enjoyed such pleasant times. She thought about that while riding up to 86th Street and Riverside Drive.

There had never been anything like San Simeon, Hearst's "ranch" on the Pacific. It was a castle with more than a hundred rooms, furnished with hangings and tapestries from European castles, a swimming pool of Italian mosaic and formal gardens filled with Greek and Roman statues. Hearst had collected everything from everywhere, the most costly art treasures, whole segments of architecture from all over the world. What Mae had liked best was the collection of animals: elephants, kangaroos, giraffe, deer, buffalo that roamed in a

vast enclosure of spiral fences under the care of an old Indian. She had often spent the whole day riding out with the Indian—who told her about each animal, where it came from, what it ate. Hearst had been a great host; he had always given her Mrs. Hearst's cottage, and in it she had found everything she might need—clothes, cosmetics, his bounty was endless. And now he was giving this farewell party. "For you, Mae," Louella had said.

Mr. Hearst himself opened the door and escorted her about the room to his guests, who were mainly bankers and lawyers; she and Louella and two dozen men. Mr. Hearst's impeccable taste was evident in the flowers and the food; there was delightful conversation about everything and anything, but primarily about the success of *The Merry Widow*. Then, just as the entree was being served, her host said, "Louella tells me you're leaving for Europe."

"Yes. I have a wonderful contract with Ufa."

He was smiling. "We'd have to boycott those films over here. You're too big box office, Mae, we couldn't allow the money to go out of the country."

"I don't . . . understand."

"It's simple. Pictures you make for Ufa will not be shown in America. We won't release them, Mae."

"But I've a contract . . . accepted a bonus . . . given my word."

"You'd best reconsider," Mr. Hearst said kindly.

"You're not just one star in a heaven of your own; you're part of an industry."

"If you left other stars would follow . . ."

"Not fair to the American film industry!"

"You can write your own ticket here."

"They're our competitors."

"Not a single American theatre."

"Did it ever occur to you," Will Hays said evenly, "that going over there is not very patriotic, Miss Murray? That you'd be working against your country's business interests, enhancing another country's rival industry?"

"Oh, no! I only want to work in a pleasant atmosphere. I've fought for every inch here. I want a different life, some courtesy. Try to understand."

"We understand that MGM wants you very much, Mae. I think things can be easier," Hearst said.

And suddenly she realized the tie-up: he released all Marion Davies' pictures through MGM. The same bankers, the same money. Louella sat waiting to hear, to write the story of her decision, and Mae was trapped. Without an American release what good would she be to Ufa?

She checked with her lawyers and took ship for Europe, to tell them herself, to return the handsome bonus. She went directly to the head of the Deutsche Bank.

"It occurred to us," he said, when she'd explained.

"It didn't occur to me!"

She handed over the money and was free, free to go on to Paris to meet Rudy and a group of friends with whom he was traveling.

"Murray, I need you, bless you for coming," he said, meeting the train. "Let us forget cares, remember when we said we'd dance at the Lido?"

Rudy didn't look well; his face was drawn and colorless. He'd left *The Eagle* unfinished. It was worrying him, she knew; his career was his blinding light. But even studio arguments, even money problems couldn't explain the way he looked.

That night when he came through the huge doors to her suite at the Crillon he leaned back against them, as if for support. His eyes burned in his face, the cigarette hung loosely between his lips.

"Rudy, you're ill!"

"She has threatened to tell the world I am no lover. Murray, how could any man answer that kind of publicity? Why should she say it?" Then he told her—Natasha Rambova was threatening divorce. Her threats were equivalent to blackmail.

"You are allowing one person to ruin you. You're giving her

the strength to do you harm when millions love you, Rudy. It's a tragic waste and it's nonsense. You don't have to prove you're a man. The public knows that. What you need is to get back to your own rhythm. Rudy, what is it?"

He was doubled up against the door.

"My stomach. I'm in pain, Murray."

"Sit down. Rest."

She sent for milk and made him drink it. "No, not another cigarette. Rest. You let people use you, Rudy. Perhaps I do too. They snatch at the candle and smother the flame. We must take care. People like this must be pushed away. 'Do not confront me with your evil.'"

A faint olive glow came into his face. He kissed her hand gratefully. "Murray, you always know what to say to me. Come, they are all waiting for us downstairs."

"You should rest, Rudy."

"When I can dance?"

There was no arguing with Rudy. They danced every night at the Ambassadeurs, the Lido, the Florida, Ciro's. One night they were in the elevator returning to her rooms when she missed her diamond bracelet, the one that dropped marquise like tears down the back of her hand. It was not thievery, of course; her diamond earrings hadn't disappeared.

They went to the prefect of police and next day were summoned back to his office. A messenger boy had found and returned the bracelet. How proud he was when he was presented with scroll and seal; it was like being knighted for honesty. It meant far more than the reward she gave him.

"Will you ever forget his face, Rudy?"

"I'll never forget yours, watching him."

They rode mornings in the Bois, enjoying the clear fall air. They had lunch and talked. Rudy heard Blanca was in Paris.

"I must see her, Murray. Just the sight of her would help me."

Forget Natasha, he meant.

"Have you tried?"

"I have tried."

So she phoned Blanca deSaulles. Yes, Blanca remembered Mae Murray; yes of course, Rudy. But she wanted no masculine attention, she was living quietly with her little boy.

"Blanca, he wants so much to see you. Isn't that a small thing after what he's suffered?"

"There's nothing to talk about."

"Allow him just to see you, Blanca. He could walk through the lobby of your hotel...the Meurice? He need not say a word, just walk through while you read."

She went with him to the Meurice, saw him disappear into the hotel, immaculate in his pearl-gray hat, pearl-gray suit and spats, his neat figure full of grace. She saw him emerge stiffly erect, his face a mask.

"Rudy..."

He didn't even hear her.

She went alone to the Louvre, stood rapt before Da Vinci's "Virgin of the Rocks," the beautiful sweeping draperies, the rocks in the background, the marvelous modeling of the woman's face. Suddenly, a guard touched her arm and she realized she was surrounded by a large crowd.

The manager of the gallery led her to his office, explaining that she was welcome, very, but they could not have crowds gathering. In crowds valuable pictures walk away. So they would open early or stay late and she could come whenever she wished outside the regular hours.

She phoned Rudy at once. "Today, they're expecting us just after closing!"

"It's all ours!" he cried, grabbing her hand, racing upstairs to the Spanish section of the Grande Galerie, to Goya and El Greco, Velasquez, Murillo, Ribera. He loved, as she did, the animation and mysticism and strength of the Spaniards. She didn't say, but wasn't it better, these immortal paintings than that one mortal Blanca with her ivory face? They never tired of the Louvre.

And they never tired of dancing. It took Rudy's mind from his troubles. One night as he led her out on the lighted glass floor of the Florida, the crowd made way, backed off, the band swung to a tango and the whole floor was theirs—for fifty-eight minutes. The crowd would not let them stop. Each time the music rose, they backed away, sat on the floor, while she and Rudy lived their childish dream. They were renowned stars, dancing in Paris as they had once danced as unknowns in New York.

"If only she could see this," he said, when finally they sat down and the delighted crowd milled around them.

"Think of what we mean to the public, Rudy. Forget her," she said. The most exquisite women vied for his glance, the most attractive men for hers. It was an endless triumph, almost as stimulating to play as to work.

When she sailed on the *Majestic*, a half-dozen of her new-found friends sailed too. William Gibbs McAdoo, noted lawyer and Presidential nominee, filled her stateroom with flowers; Ambassador Alexander Moore, returning from his post in Spain, took her to dinner; Georges Carpentier, the handsome French boxer, pleaded with her to teach him the Charleston. He was on his way to see the Dempsey-Tunney fight in Philadelphia. When Carpentier grew too amorous, she danced with others. He was a powerful man; it was hard to imagine his having taken a beating, even from Dempsey.

One night she was awakened by a pounding on the door. "*Message, importante,*" said a high-pitched French voice.

She was half asleep. "Place the message beneath the door."

"*Impossible, impossible . . .*" and at that moment the door burst open and a great wild woman, red-haired, rushed in.

Mae reached for her peignoir but the woman grabbed her, tore off the red wig—Carpentier! They struggled awkwardly about the room.

"Didn't you feel it when we danced?" he demanded. "Sparks between us, little blonde one?"

"I felt the music."

"You've driven me wild for years. I see your pictures. You are the essence of sex, the Merry Widow."

He left, finally, furious.

Ambassador Moore was gallantry itself. He didn't understand, either.

"I want no emotional ties," she told him.

"I have no intention of marrying Rudy," she told reporters who came swarming up from the tender before the ship had even docked.

"We understand the minute Natasha Rambova's divorce becomes final," ... "You were together constantly."

"Rudy and I are old, old friends; little sister, big brother."

"When we talked to him last he said he wanted a domestic wife, what about that?"

"You see! I hate to cook. I prefer to have someone prepare my breakfast. I'm not a bit domestic."

"Is it true, you and Rudy? Is it true? Is it true?" She had to stop answering the phone in New York. She spoke only to Nick Schenck. He promised her everything and she signed for four pictures at MGM.

"With a little time in between," she implored him. "I want to play. You know I have never before played?"

William McAdoo asked her to marry him. Ambassador Moore followed her to California. He'd been in love with her for years; did she remember the night of *Peacock Alley* when they'd met at the Commodore, when Lillian Russell was still alive? He could offer her a life of travel moving in the top diplomatic circles of the world; his next post would undoubtedly be Peru. "I would give you such a wonderful life, you would learn to like me and then to love me."

"*Mama mia*, I'd better get out of this!" she thought. She said, "Dear Alex, you are a very important man, you exert leadership and I am just an actress, learning to play."

She opened a magnificent house and plunged into the life stream of Hollywood as she never had before, as Bob would



Mae's drawing room in New York apartment had gold leaf ceiling, hand-painted beams, and stained-glass windows, was furnished with Italian and Spanish antiques.

Bedroom in nine-room duplex had mirrored doors, orchid taffeta draperies, embroidered purple velvet bedspread, and Venetian chest. Mae bought this luxurious *Des Artistes* apartment while making films for her own company in Manhattan.





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Wedding party at Mae's marriage to Prince David Mdivani.

Bride and groom (*center*), Pola Negri, matron of honor, and Rudy Valentino, best man (*second and third from left*). Valentino gave lavish wedding breakfast at Ambassador Hotel.



Princess and Prince Mdivani after wedding in Beverly Hills. After completing *Valencia*, Mae allowed her husband to persuade her to abandon Hollywood.

In *The French Doll* Mae played daughter of antique dealer and acted out historic vignettes with each object sold. Mae's love of gardenias won her sobriquet, "the gardenia of the screen."



ALFRED CHENEY JOHNSTON

Scene from *Love at First Sight*, with Jason Robards, Sr., and Keno, a Russian wolfhound, in Central Park near her *Des Artistes* apartment. Film portrayed vicissitudes of young Broadway actress.

PARAMOUNT





In stage play *The Milky Way*, with Brian Donlevy, Mae acted as girl friend of prize-fight manager. Critics noted her skill in tough comedy role.

TALBOT

Mae poses for magazine photo in casual summer costume she designed for a fashion line to be named for her.



never have let her. She had played in Paris, in New York, now she would play in Hollywood.

She went to Marion Davies' costume party and stole the show as a Spanish señorita in a revealing costume of silver lace, and a dark red wig.

Connie Talmadge gave a birthday party for Dick Barthelmess at her beach house and everyone came and sat on the sand. The Talmadge girls were fun-loving, and they showed it on the screen. Connie had always been the gay comedienne; now Norma, the dramatic actress, had made *Kiki* and was in a Kiki mood; and of course Natalie was gay—she'd have to be, married to dead-pan comedian Buster Keaton. They were a close-knit family. Joe Schenck, Norma's husband, was Buster's producer. The only one not involved in the business was Connie's husband Alastair Mackintosh; but he was a genial easygoing man and a fine host. Mae wore white slacks, a white sweater and a big white sun hat, and sat on the fence with Rudy and Pola Negri, "Fatty" Arbuckle and Carmel Myers, watching the breakers roll in.

The colony was friendlier and more relaxed. "We are all learning to live," she told Connie Talmadge. They were used to the money, finally, and knew how to enjoy it. Sundays they rode at Uplifters Ranch in Santa Monica—they all had their own horses—and after the morning ride adjourned to Norma's house or Frances Marion and Fred Thompson's. Frances was an outstanding screen writer, Fred the cowboy star. They had an English butler who deplored the way they came in in their riding clothes, heaped their plates at the buffet, and then sat on the living-room floor eating, laughing, handling with ease the heavy crested silver (they all had crested silver, did it matter whose crest?). One Sunday at breakfast he announced "The Countess Dombksi." He uttered it with a flourish as if, finally, someone of merit had arrived; and Pola Negri made a grand entrance. She was creating quite a stir with her wicked roles under the direction of Ernst Lubitsch, who had originally made her a star in Germany. Pola parked under the piano and

when the startled butler asked her if she'd have breakfast, she half-closed her great eyes and intoned, "Just a soupçon—of *gin*."

It was delightful. They were all light-hearted and full of gaiety. Mae herself was carefree as she'd never been. The struggle with Von Stroheim, with Bob, over Ufa, had changed the pace. Why, she'd never even played as a child. It had all been ambition and drive to get somewhere, be somebody. So here she was! She could cut herself off from work now, put as much verve into her new part off stage as she had into her old parts on screen.

With the Talmadge girls she worked for Motion Picture Relief Fund, putting up money and buildings to help those early screen idols who had not kept pace. *They* hadn't known how to adapt themselves to changing times. Today Hollywood was different. There were parties every Sunday, sometimes three or four. Every fourth Sunday, Mae threw open her home for lavish entertainment. Orchestras played indoors and out, caterers served the choicest food and good liquor, the celebrated of two continents danced, chatted, flirted in the light from her giant candles: stars and diplomats, directors, writers. Jack Gilbert brought Greta Garbo. They were in love and radiant but Greta worried about the studio, she was shy, there seemed such commotion, her energies were sapped.

"You should have a dressing room right on the set, as I do, darling," Mae told her. "A chaise longue, flowers, a burning candle."

A. C. Blumenthal talked real estate with Lowell Sherman, Bebe Daniels and Bessie Love talked of gems, Jack Conway and Woody Van Dyke talked shop with Lubitsch, Ambassador Moore came to press his suit; Rudolf Friml, the composer, sent extravagant boxes of flowers, equally extravagant messages and lured her to the music room to play for her alone. Dudley Murphy and William Howard took her Rolls away and had it filled to the brim with flowers.

When Pola gave a birthday party for Rudy, Mae went attended by chauffeur and footman, like Cinderella in her most

diaphanous chiffon, and literally danced into the great white-pillared house where music played, where you could hear a dozen different languages spoken. She only wished Rudy could have been as heart-free as she. There was dancing and food and a cascade of liquor. Then, looking for a moment's quiet, she slipped into a side room to rest on a brocaded couch. She lay back, drew a long breath, and closed her eyes. Almost the next instant someone leaned over her, a mouth touched hers. She leaped up to face an athletic-looking man with curly blond hair.

"In my country this is how it is," he said.

"Well in my country . . ."

"Prince David Mdivani," Rudy said, coming in. "You work very fast, David." And he gave him a knowing look.

"The prince doesn't know our customs," she said crisply.

"In my country, we come out with it. I am for you, you are for me," he said ardently.

"Let me assure you, I am not for anyone, Prince Mdivani. You couldn't be more wrong," she said, "and I certainly hope no one is for me."

12



At two o'clock the same night, the watchman tapped softly at her bedroom door. A gentleman was downstairs asking for her.

"I have retired. Why should you even inquire?"

"He is a very persistent gentleman. He is Prince David Mdivani."

"Bid him good night."

The next morning he phoned. He was around the corner, could he pay his respects? She explained she was just leaving; but before she could step from the door to her car, he had driven up in a battered jalopy, rushed to her side, dropped to his knees, and was avidly kissing her hand. It was totally absurd and conspicuous.

"In my coun-try we live by the heart," he said when she scolded him.

She laughed. Kneeling there in the sun with his fair coloring, crinkled gold hair and stern nose, he looked like a Botticelli painting.

"Let me tell you I am a fine lover, more powerful than those you kiss on the screen."

"How fortunate for you," she said, stepping quickly into her car. His image trembled for a moment on the window glass. She had to laugh again, remembering the high-flown style and the battered car. When she returned home the butler reported seven calls. The same the next day. She never spoke with Prince Mdivani, he was far too demanding.

David did not take this reluctance seriously. There weren't too many titled young men available in America and he and his brothers had been well received. Alex was courting Louise Van Alen, granddaughter of John Jacob Astor. There was no reason, he felt, why titles should not be as popular in Hollywood as in east-coast society.

Here he erred. Titles were *more* of a novelty in Hollywood; film society was inclined to follow eastern society, but with a time lag of some years. When Pola Negri arrived in the film colony, she had already married and divorced a Polish count and the title, Countess Dombbski—on which she insisted—had become a big publicity point and a sore point in the feud between Pola and Gloria Swanson at Paramount. Gloria had evened the score by marrying the Marquis Henri de la Falaise de Coudray. She had installed footmen in powdered wigs and knee breeches in their home and sent out invitations in the name of Madame la Marquise. A prince, even of the small kingdom of Georgia, was more impressive than count or marquis, and David had gone to Pola's party expressly to meet Mae Murray, highest of the three feminine top box-office attractions, and the only one without a title.

Money *was* an object. Ill fortune had fallen on the Mdivanis with the establishment of the Communist regime in Russia. Prince Zachary, David's father, had been a member of the Imperial court, aide-de-camp to Tzar Nicholas. After the Revolution of 1917, the elder Mdivani had been made Secretary of War in the Georgian National Government and Military Governor of the District of Batum, but once the Communists came to power the huge Mdivani oil properties in the Caucasus had been confiscated and the family had been exiled to Paris with

the rest of the government. They still were required to pay large taxes on their confiscated land. They had to live, and they were used to living well.

But from the moment David saw Mae Murray, money was not the sole object. She became for him—as she had for Jay O'Brien and Bob Leonard and millions of movie fans—the ultimate in feminine appeal. Hers was a rare combination: sex and blonde naïveté. He made up his mind on the instant and planned his campaign.

Several Sundays later, Mae and Connie Talmadge were strolling through Mae's crowded, candlelit garden. It had been a gala day, high lunch after the morning canter; now at dusk there was a busy hum to the place punctuated by a man's laughter, echoed in trills by the pretty starlets who surrounded him. Friml was at the piano, his dulcet melody rose strong and clear: "Rose Mar-ie, I love you, I'm always dreaming of you." He caught sight of her, bowed, blew a kiss, his fingers flying.

"You start work tomorrow," Ramón Novarro said. "Come by Stage Six, have lunch with me on the Heidelberg set. We have genuine beer steins, maybe a little near-beer."

"Playtime is over, tomorrow I go back to *work*, Ramón."

Someone indoors was fooling with the radio, a harmonica sounded and was promptly silenced.

"Just like Vitaphone," laughed the man with the booming voice; the girls giggled a flute accompaniment.

"Warners are taking an awful chance."

"What have they to lose?"

Threads of conversation floated through the garden.

"I thought Rudy and Pola..."

"The way she clings to him!"

"We saw Gertrude Lawrence in *Oh Kay*."

"Give me Lenore Ulric."

"Sound is fine on stage, on screen it would destroy an art!"

"Jack, when do they sneak *The Big Parade*?"

He was showing off his Greta in a gown of flame red.

"I am adoring you," said a foreign voice. "I am here."

So close, Mae almost touched him as she turned. "Prince Mdivani, I didn't invite you."

"In your heart you did." He put his hand on her arm.

"You are not acting like a prince."

"Also we are men and act like men."

"Which includes running after girls like a schoolboy?"

"Nothing like the boy, let me prove it."

She flicked her feet in their little heeled boots and turned away.

"I do not like you in pants. Not enough womanly," he said.

She ignored that. Ignore him and he'd disappear. She moved away, across the garden.

Lowell Sherman and Ernst Lubitsch were arguing about sound. As a former stage actor, Lowell couldn't wait to do a sound picture. As the top director in the business (his continental wit and sophisticated humor had now quite outstripped DeMille's spectacles) Lubitsch felt that sound would necessitate experiment. He would not rush in. The microphone must not be static, the camera must not be static, it would take time to work it all out.

Someone decided to go swimming, a red-headed chap from the Biltmore band; soon there was screaming and splashing, the pool was illuminated into a carnival of bright blue water and gleaming bodies, spray showered the lawn. Mae danced with Ramón and with Lowell; finally, very late, she waved them all away from the front door and went upstairs, tired but still exhilarated.

The coverlet on the great bed had been turned down, the pale pink comforters were suspended like pastel clouds. She sat to pull off a jodhpur boot and before her eyes the closet door swung open and a man stepped out. Startled, Mae screamed. The next moment she recognized him.

"David Mdivani, how dare you! This is absurd."

"Pronounce it *Dahvid*, dear one."

"How long have you been here?"

He began to laugh. "Three, maybe three and a half hours. I ran out once to wash my face. My God, it was so hot."

His cheeks were splashed with color.

"You are impossible. You must go at once." She rang for the butler and ran quickly down the stairs. The butler came tying his tie.

"Madame, I regret, I presumed the guests had..."

"This one was hidden. Prince Mdivani."

The butler bowed deferentially. He'd never been this obsequious to anyone! "You wish a bite to eat, Madame?"

She started to shake her head.

"Thank you yes, I am famished," Mdivani said, slapping his hard chest.

"Perhaps cold turkey for His Highness? Perhaps wine?"

"Excellent," he said. "And rye bread, sliced thin."

She frowned. "Hiding in a lady's boudoir. What sort of nonsense is that?"

"Very dramatic, yes? Forgive me this one time. I swear never again to do it, My."

He said her name as if she belonged to him. "My."

"You see, in my coun-try..."

"And which precisely is your country?"

"Georgia. Is under the protectorate of Russia," he shrugged his shoulders, "under the *Kremlin*. All Georgian nobility have fled to exile in Paris. They left everything behind, they take common jobs! It is sad what has happened to my coun-try. A proud ancient Mediterranean people, and since the Communists nothing but a football, from one nation to another."

The butler presented with a flourish the platter of turkey, swung the champagne about in the ice bucket.

"Someday we go back and take over this land again. And the money, millions, and the title. We have had this title since 1752 for military feats of valor. Very military the Georgian nobility." He squared his shoulders.

"And what are you doing in a military way now, Prince Mdivani?"

He laughed, speared a pile of slivered turkey with his fork, dabbed it in mustard and chewed with enjoyment. He shook his head at the butler, poured the champagne himself, lifted his glass to her and tossed off the drink in one draught. "Friends of our coun-try send my brother Alex to Oxford where there is a fine Georgian library. Other friends, manufacturers of money—yes, really they make the paper—send Serge and me to America, to Andover. I study oil at college and drill on the oil fields. Someday when it is time to go back, I will use this knowledge of oil."

She hoped they would get back to their country, she said.

"We will. You see. Someday you marry me, we live in Tiflis like royalty."

"In this country, I *am* royalty," she said, with a smile.

He shrugged. "Make-believe. Perhaps I should make love on the screen too. Many say I am handsome. You could help me?"

"I could introduce you," she said slowly. "Perhaps Irving Thalberg would give you a test. Are you really interested?"

"In being near you I am interested." His hands captured hers. "I adore you from the time I see you. You are my breath. You cry out for love." He kissed her wrist. The butler withdrew.

"Prince Mdivani!"

"*David*, please, My."

She had to smile. He was so sure of himself and so wrong. "All right, David. Let us understand one thing. I have no wish for love, or marriage. You must stop forcing your attentions. I'll let you know about the screen test, but let me remind you, more than just good looks are required. There is a quality like electric light that projects on screen. Milton Sills is not handsome, nor Richard Dix; Emil Jannings is ugly. Also you must work hard. Your arrogance is not likely to be welcome."

"For so much money, I can be a trifle less arrogant, no?"

When he did come to the studio, he walked onto the *Altars of Desire* set with such authority no one thought to stop him. Mae, clad in the scantiest of bead costumes, was flirting with "the French count," Conway Tearle. It was a long take. David observed closely. When the director called "*Print*," he approached, bowed in his most devoted manner, made himself and her the focus of attention. Mae was most businesslike. She introduced him to Thalberg and a screen test was arranged. A few days later, in a projection room, his shadow made its debut.

"I look good, I could be your leading man," David said, with his incredible cockiness.

But the vital quality didn't come through. Whatever it was that made him disarming in person, the facile hands and continental manner failed to register on the screen. When they parted at the studio gate, David stared boldly through the beads of her low-cut gown.

"I do not like your costumes for this picture," he said. "I do not wish to share you."

She assured him he couldn't share what he didn't have, and held out her hand.

"I come by the house and pay my compliments," he said.

"Please don't."

"You take my life from me."

"To the contrary, I give you your life and freedom as I value mine."

He clicked his heels and left. It had been easier than Mae had thought.

Three nights later she was awakened by her frenzied butler. The night watchman had found Prince Mdivani on the front walk with his wrists slashed!

He lay in the front hall, when she ran down, his eyes closed, his hands limp, the watchman was swabbing the floor with towels to catch the blood. Cook came running with bandages.

"Bind tightly," Mae said. "You men tie the bandage up higher. Get the yardstick, break it in two." She showed them

how to make a tourniquet. She'd learned once as a nurse in a picture. "Carry him to the downstairs bedroom. Watchman, get the blood off the walk." She phoned a doctor and the doctor assured her the patient would live, but he needed blood and it would be better not to move him.

That was quite all right. Let him stay; it would be better that way, it could be kept quiet. She dreaded the thought that word might get out. She could just imagine the headlines. PRINCE ATTEMPTS SUICIDE FOR LOVE OF MAE. How dared he lay this violence at her door?

David was tended carefully, she saw to that and she paid all the bills, but she never saw or spoke to him. When the butler told her several weeks later that he was well enough to leave, she wrote a note:

"Prince Mdivani, I am glad you have recovered your health. I wish you well. Never, never come to this house again."

Mae gave strict orders he was not to be admitted, all his phone calls were refused. In spite of everything, one night when she was curled up on the divan with the evening papers, the butler did let Mdivani in. The butler feared more violence; perhaps if Madame would talk to the Prince he would leave.

David greeted her humbly. "Allow me to reinstate myself," he said. "I must thank you."

"Such disregard for your own life, you make it difficult for me to even like you," she told him.

"My life is nothing without you. Do me a great favor. Ride for one hour in this lovely night. Is this so much to ask? I would give you my life."

She hesitated.

"On my mother's honor . . . let me show you I am civilized, give me an hour."

In any script the heroine would wonder: have I the right to make another human being so abject? She would probably pick up the wool scarf from the hall table and go with him. Mae did. In her gold-brocaded housecoat, she let him tuck her into the funny battered car. There were two small explosions

and off they went, through Beverly Hills and up north toward the mountains. There was a view he wanted to show her. She must not worry about the car, he worked on it himself, it was better than all the big cars he'd had in his life. Cars! When they were kids, he, Serge and Alex, they had taken apart one of his father's Minervas.

A costly plaything, Mae thought. But she had to admit that he was behaving well now. He did not touch her. He kept his eyes on the mountain road and his hands on the wheel and spoke not a word of love. When she admired his cigarette case of wrought Byzantine gold, he promptly gave it to her. He told her of his father and his sisters and life in Georgia when he was a boy. The horses he and his brothers had ridden, the great dogs. He talked calmly for the first time since they had met. The car whipped up the mountain road to the crest and the view was worth the race; the night city, laced with jeweled lights, lay below them. David stopped the car, got out and opened the door.

"I used to walk along the firebreaks in the hills when I first came here," she said.

"Now I carry you." He swung her up lightly. Before she had a chance to grasp the situation, he had stepped across the road, swung her down on the porch of some hunter's cabin, flicked on a flashlight and ushered her in.

"Why do I get into these things?" she thought, furious with herself for having trusted him. Struggle was obviously useless; he was a powerfully built man and they were miles from anywhere. He struck a match and started the fire, lit a candle—he had planned it to the last detail, that was evident—and suggested that they have a bite to eat. He was very casual as he prepared soup, crackers, tinned meat, pickles and wine. Then he spread a clean cloth on the table, brought it over to where she sat, very haughty on the old leather couch, and spread the feast.

"St. Agnes Eve," he said lightly, offering her the dish of meat, pouring the wine.

"I didn't know you cared for poetry, Prince Mdivani." She would not eat.

"You know nothing of me," he said, sitting down and tossing off a glass of wine. "That is why we are here. I ask only for time with you. At your house, you sit on a pinnacle and dismiss me with a cruel word or two. Here, we have time and quiet to talk like a man and a woman."

She said nothing. She sipped a little wine for its warmth.

"Women are not like this in my country. They are not so independent and men are not Little Lord Fauntleroy. They have manhood. Only manhood gives a woman happiness. I offer you mine. I offer you everything I have."

Mae averted her eyes and refused to answer. She didn't speak to him for two days. At night he locked her in the living room and she slept in snatches on the lumpy couch. He had provided blankets and a pillow, in the bathroom was scented soap and a lipstick. In the daytime, she walked about the house and out onto the rough porch in her gold-brocaded skirts, wondering if the butler had called the studio. Was the studio searching for her? What kind of a story would this make if the police were called in?

This man seemed determined to drag her down. She alternately loathed him and pitied him. He must care deeply if he was willing first to throw his life away and now to lay himself open to charges of criminal kidnapping. She had never known anyone to care that much about anything. She had spent her life portraying emotion, but who had ever *felt* such emotion?

On the third day she ate some lunch, tinned lobster and a glass of sherry, but when he implored her to speak, she averted her face. Mdivani seemed to lose all control of himself then. He rushed out, slammed the door and started to sob. It went on for hours, this shattering sound of suffering. Jay had cried, but in a burst of fury. This was a sustained flood of sorrow such as Mae had never heard before. It was unbearable, she felt as if she were drowning. In desperation, she rapped on the door.

"You ask me to call you by your given name. Very well, David, stop this. Pull yourself together and we will talk."

A few minutes later, he opened the door and stood gazing at her with such longing that her heart contracted. "David, people should not hurt each other. You hurt me and I..." She hadn't meant to, but she took one step, and he seized her, buried his face in her neck. It was the most surprising moment of Mae Murray's life. There was no camera, no clever tilting of the head, she was simply in this man's arms giving herself to his demanding ardor.

"You've never been in love, tell me!"

She never had. She'd never even dreamed it possible. She felt like a woman for the first time.

They were married four days later at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Beverly Hills, David Mdivani, and Mae Kdahly, she never explained where that name came from. David insisted on being baptized; he wanted a marriage nothing could break. Rudy was best man, Pola asked to be matron of honor. Rudy had planned the whole wedding remarkably well, given this short notice. The bridal party assembled at his house and he sat in the limousine with Mae's hand in his all the way to the church.

"You are sure, little Murray, you think David will make you happy?" He asked the same question again at the church.

"Oh yes, yes," she flicked her hand over the shoulder of Rudy's elegant cutaway, touched his wing collar and foulard tie, and went tripping down the aisle on white satin-shod feet to her waiting prince. Music soared from the organ, and at the altar the priest began to intone the age-old ceremony. There were tears in David's eyes as he placed the ring on Mae's hand.

They all posed on the lawn for the photographers who had been searching every church in Hollywood. Mae remembered what was expected of her, posed her little feet, arranged her white chiffon dress with its deep hem of fox, lifted her head, and leaned against her husband. His arms were about her all the way to the Ambassador, and at the table—as if he feared

she would escape him again—he crushed her huge orchid to pieces. Rudy was host at the breakfast and it was a lavish one. He wanted for her the happiness he hadn't found. Mae enjoyed the tenderness, the gay congratulations and kisses, the flashbulbs popping. Agnes Ayres and Pola wishing her well, bushels of telegrams, the champagne and wedding cake. One of the newsmen said, "Congratulations, Mae. Gloria only got a Marquis!" And she laughed because nothing mattered, she was in his arms, a woman fulfilled at last.

13



Mae and David walked along the craggy shore at Pebble Beach, following a narrow footpath along the cliff's edge. It was a gray day, the wind felt raw against their faces, the sky spread its steel dome over the sea. Rib after rib, the long unbroken swell arched up into a wall of water, crashed toward shore and ebbed, leaving foamy tendrils in its wake. They leaned against a cypress, arm in arm, pausing for breath. For a month they had been traveling slowly up the coast, completely content together. There was only one flaw. The time had come to go home and David resented it.

"I'm an actress, Davey. I have a job to do. *Valencia* starts shooting Monday."

"I don't want my wife to work. We'll go to Europe. I want you like this, my wife."

Oddly enough, she didn't mind his possessiveness. It was manly. It was as it should be. He was a sorcerer, exerting a kind of magic quite new to her. "I'd love that, David. As soon as my contract's finished. I've three more pictures."

"Now," he whispered.

"As soon as I've finished the three."

"Now," he urged, kissing her right there in the raw wind.

"I promise, Davey, the moment my contract's finished."

That restored peace and they drove lazily back down the coast. David said he would stop working now in the oil fields, it wasn't suitable for the husband of Mae Murray; he would start making preparations for Europe. Mae said yes to everything, she felt relaxed and complete. All the driving fierce ambition had faded. She was going to have a child.

This raised another problem. To David it was unthinkable that she should dance and "display" herself carrying his child. It debased, he said, every custom of his country. When a woman was pregnant, she should be hidden, no one should see her except her husband. Mae explained that no one would know. She looked the same as ever, she was enjoying the dances for *Valencia*, and she didn't want to argue. Von Stroheim's stooge Roy D'Arcy was in the picture; his very presence was irksome. When she came home at night, she wanted to put everything else behind her. But David was obsessed. He was waiting when the car drove up. He flung open the front door, brushed the footman aside and carried her, dramatically, up the stairs to her room. Once she was settled on the satin settee, he knelt beside her and implored her to run away with him to Europe. At first this was flattering, then it became monotonous.

It was a relief, actually, when Serge Mdivani came to visit. Mae didn't really like Serge; he was more Oriental than David, he influenced David who, she felt, shouldn't kowtow even to an older brother. But he helped fill David's empty days. The brothers went to the races, the polo games, to Tijuana for gambling.

One night, a whole party went down to Grauman's Million Dollar Theatre to see Rudy's personal appearance with *The Son of the Sheikh*. He was about to leave on tour with the picture and he'd called and asked them to come. Afterwards, they all went to the Cocoanut Grove. Pola was in a pique, she hadn't

liked the love scenes with Vilma Banky, the new beauty from Hungary.

"I am glad the picture is over," she said. "When he is working, I have to share him with too many. Every morning he boxes with the professional boxers, all day he makes love to the Hungarian. At night, if I'm not careful, he's out in the garage monkeying with the carburetor of the car!"

Rudy laughed and acted romantic all the way to the Grove, he sang "The Kashmiri Love Song" to Pola in his resonant voice. The Rolls Royce was filled with his voice and the scent of his Abdullah cigarettes. David did not dance, so Mae danced with Rudy and Pola danced with Serge. Despite their gaiety, a pall seemed to hang over Rudy.

"You should go to a milk farm, Rudy. I used to go after every picture. You drink milk for three weeks and come back refreshed inside and out."

He smiled at her with his gentle eyes. "Suppose the newspapers found I was drinking milk? I'd be worse than a powder-puff. A man who can outwrestle, outbox, outwordplay the villain must drink burning brandy!"

The band played a tango for them. Rudy drew her close, bent her back—no one could dance like this. But when it was over and he led her to the table his mouth was tight with pain.

"Murray, a man should control his life," he said. "Mine is controlling me. I don't like it."

From the moment he left there were headlines about Rudy. *The Chicago Tribune* ran another scurrilous column about the "pink powder-puff man," and Rudy challenged the writer to either a boxing match or a wrestling match to prove who was more of a man. The writer never came out from behind his anonymity. Jack Dempsey said if he had, Rudy could have licked him. A week later, Rudy was rushed to a hospital in New York with perforated ulcers that necessitated an emergency operation.

When Mae phoned the hospital, he was too weak to speak. She phoned again. It was Saturday; David, Serge and Pola sat

in the living room. Pola and Serge had become inseparable.

"Murray, I'm better." She could barely hear his voice. "To-day the press came. I sat up in bed and smoked. I showed them..."

The voice trailed off. A nurse said, "He should not be talking, Miss Murray, after serious surgery. Perhaps we'll have better news tomorrow."

Pola disengaged herself from Serge and came to the phone.

"They won't let him talk," Mae sighed, "he's very weak. Oh David, it breaks my heart to hear him."

The next day Rudy was dead. Peritonitis and pleurisy had killed the gallant man who had eluded so many screen perils and known so many sorrows. He died with the crucifix pressed to his lips, and the newspapers carried detailed reports of his last moments. "Don't pull down the blinds," the sick man had said. "I feel fine. I want the sunlight to greet me." The last one to see him alive had been Jean Acker, his former wife, one of his lost dreams.

For Rudy most of the dreams had been lost. He loved acting and dreamed of playing Caesar Borgia and the tragic heroes of Benelli, Pirandello and D'Annunzio, with whom he felt identity. As a boy he had watched from the gallery such dramatic artists as Novelli and Grassi, and as a man he longed to portray their kind of character parts on the screen. He hated his roles as "The Young Rajah" and "The Son of the Sheik." In them, he said, "I am beginning to look more and more like my miserable imitators." The only two parts he'd really liked were Julio of *The Four Horsemen* and Juan Gallardo of *Blood and Sand*. "Julio," he told Mae, "was a man who allowed his weakness to dictate his circumstances—myself."

He loved paintings, beautiful rich textures and fabrics, and the home he built, *Falcon's Lair*, was the shrine of a sybarite; but when he and Natasha invited their friends to their first open house, Rudy was appalled. "Our open house started with dignity and elegance. Under the influence of gin it turned into a bawdyhouse riot," he said. And of course Natasha had lived

only briefly at *Falcon's Lair*. His yearning for a great love, home and children never materialized.

Mae grieved for him. Only a little while ago he had been sunning himself on the beach, dabbling in poetry, seeking out H. L. Mencken, to show him his literary efforts, dreaming of love, of marriage and a family. She felt humbly grateful for David. When he held her through a long night, pleading with her to give up her work for his sake, she understood finally how much it meant. Rudy had wanted just such a private life and never found it; she had found it and that was all that mattered. She and David had been given their chance, they mustn't waste it. She gave him her word. *Valencia* was to be finished that week. They would leave at once.

And it was at this point that Mae made a serious mistake. She did not tell the studio of her decision. If she had explained that she was going to have a baby, that she must have time out, the matter could have been arranged. Instead, in the middle of her MGM contract, she simply left, as surreptitiously as possible. She'd had a large sum of money transferred to Paris; even the servants didn't know where she was going or for how long; the bank would give them notice and pay them until they could find work. A manager was hired to handle the house and other properties.

"Mr. and Mrs. David Divani" slipped onto the *Chief* at Glendale, at night, without even a maid. They stayed in their stateroom on the train, kept to their suite on the ship, came out only at night to stroll on the upper deck. They saw no one until the Mdivanis met them at the train in Paris.

David waved his hat and a tall, dark, clean-shaven man broke from the knot of people and hurried forward. Before David could say her name, the man had caught and pressed her to him. He would not relinquish her, he cried "Lily, Lily!"

David was talking rapidly in a strange language.

"Papa," a tall, fair girl said. "Let her down, you're crushing her flowers."

He let her go, but he kept on murmuring "Lily, Lily" and gazed at her with adoration.

"Our mother was blonde. Her name was Lily, and you resemble her. I am Russadana, Russie."

"The younger sister," David said, "and this is our good friend José Sert, the painter, he is engaged to marry Russie. Later you meet my older sister Nina and her husband, the lawyer Charles Huberich. My brother Alex comes soon..."

"Next week he comes, David."

"We have an apartment for you in the Champs Elysées."

"Tonight you are my guests, we have a dinner party, you meet our friends."

Everyone talked at once. The father took her hand in his and kissed it reverently. He had smoldering eyes like John Gilbert's. Mae felt as though she'd known him a long time.

"He says you are the image of Mama," Russie translated.

"You are very beautiful. Beyond what is on the screen. I should like to paint you for David," said José Sert.

"First I do her in sculpture," said Russie quickly. She resembled David but was much less emotional. A cold one but not so cold perhaps where Mr. Sert was concerned.

A camera clicked. Reporters and photographers came swooping down on them. "Miss Murray, how long will you be here?" "Is it true you struck Von Stroheim?" "What picture do you make next for MGM? Will you and your husband stand right over here?"

"I must refuse," David said, leading them off. "My father is not too well, this is a personal moment." In America there would have been angry words. Here the photographers shrugged, nodded, walked away.

"You come with us to the Meurice, our friends are waiting."

It was an international and artistic group to which the Mdivanis belonged. José Sert had a studio two and a half stories high where he worked on larger-than-life-size figures. He showed them his work and introduced other painters and

sculptors. There were other Georgians, very demonstrative and animated. David's father devoted himself to Mae, with Russie acting as interpreter. He told of his affairs at the court of Nicholas II. Nina played the piano. There was a trio later, with a slender reed of a man playing the violin and David at the cello. Mae was an appreciative listener, for she knew they were extending themselves to entertain her.

The next morning she received a cable:

PREPARATIONS READY FOR NEW PICTURE STOP PLEASE RETURN
BY NEXT BOAT STOP PICTURES SOLD AND MUST BE DELIVERED TO
EXHIBITORS. MAYER

"Do not answer," David said. She threw the message in the trash basket. That's where all the cables went, and they arrived in quantity. The studio didn't understand. She was no longer an actress, she was a woman living her own scenario with her husband. They found luxurious small hotels in France, Switzerland, Norway, Italy; they found cool lakes and snowy mountains, they shopped everywhere for lovely things. The vast sum that had been transferred to Paris was in David's name and Mae's, and they were spending it like royalty. Mae had given a large sum too to cover the Mdivani family needs, and more to take care of taxes on the oil holdings in the Caucasus.

As time for the baby drew near, they found a spacious villa near Neuchâtel and engaged a retinue of servants. The weather was balmy, spring had come early—for the baby, Mae thought. What at first had been a flutter, a brush, a wink like the opening and closing of an eyelid or the motion of a wasp's wing, was vigorous now, the child sending a message. David worshiped her swelling body, it was proof of love, proof of virility. In the warm nights, wakened by a sudden violent lurch, they'd cling together, thrilled.

The town's Musée des Beaux Arts had a good collection of modern Swiss painting, the Gymnase's museum of natural history showed the collection of Agassiz. Mae was fascinated by an ancient squat fish fossil the great naturalist had found right at Neuchâtel. They read some of Agassiz' writings and

Mae was struck by this: "If you study nature in books, when you go out of doors, you cannot find her. The book of nature is always open."

"And they used to think me pixie for walking in Central Park, visiting the squirrels, and smelling the earth."

She wore a large straw hat to shade her face and David carried her up a small hill where they could watch the lake. They had picnic lunches from his knapsack. Pale lemon light floated over her dress, on her hand as it lay in his. She had never been happier.

Toward evening, they often drove out to watch the sunset. Foothills rose purple against the golden glow. They lay like human shapes, with great seductive hips, breasts pointed high.

Mae stroked David's bare arm as it lay along the wheel, touching the soft blond hair. "I've lived in a world all my own, David. I've never really known anyone before. But I think I know you. You're just like me. We feel everything the same."

"Bubi, I am different, I am male."

She knew better. They reacted to everything with two pairs of eyes and one heart. Every sense was sharpened. Even food tasted better after a night of love. The tart peaches coated with cream, the bite of the caraway in buttered rye bread toast, eggs bursting their yolks, sugared ham frizzled from the iron pan, scalding coffee. Nothing could spoil their idyl, not even the most recent cable forwarded from Paris.

YOU MUST COME BACK AND FULFILL YOUR CONTRACT OTHERWISE
YOU WILL RUIN YOUR REPUTATION SCHENCK

It was tossed away like the others.

The baby was born, a tiny perfect infant, with round blue eyes, David's well-shaped mouth, Mae's straight nose, and a coxcomb of golden hair. "Koran," she called him because it alluded to knowledge and there must be great potential in that small head. She adored the child from the moment he was put into her arms.

They traveled now with a great entourage, the baby and its

nurse with them in the Rolls, the other servants in a second car. They went to Paris to show David's father his new grandson. Alex was in Paris and Mae didn't like Alex. He was the commanding officer, he ordered everyone about; and as soon as he'd spoken to David, David told her that more money was needed, quite a large sum for family debts. Anything the father needed, he could have, but she didn't like Alex giving the orders. She was glad when they went on to the south of France, avoiding the American tourist places, living quietly.

One day David showed her a clipping: "What has become of glamorous Mae Murray? She seems to have completely disappeared from sight." They laughed over that. It was just what they wanted. Koran had never been announced at all. David shared Mae's horror of publicity that brought the world into one's bedroom.

Koran was crawling, he had a head full of curls. Mae never tired of talking to him and playing with him, and he followed every word of hers with his wide child's eyes, as if he understood. He seemed to grow under their eyes—there were creases at his wrists, dimples at his knees; Mae loved to bathe him, to watch David handle the boy with his strong hands.

They took a house at Pas de Cheville in Switzerland, skied and skated, took Koran out in a sled with tiny bells, and brought him back, his cheeks rosy with cold. When David played music on their Swiss record player, she danced with Koran in her arms, and the baby made music of his own, crooning and burbling. David wanted her every minute, resented even the slightest errand that took her away from him. When they went to Paris, he was unhappy, they weren't *alone*.

"Bubi, let us go to Saint-Nazaire. Remember once outside the town we saw a little pink palace overlooking the Loire? We should have such a place near the sea where we can swim. It is time I teach the boy to swim in the sea."

David was in a hurry to toughen his son but Koran should not swim just yet. He was a sturdy boy but fragile too, with

lavender veins on his eyelids, tiny transparent fingernails, the minute markings of his brows. The miracle was that all this intricacy should *be*. But the house at Saint-Nazaire was a fine idea and Mae went at once to the bank. Would the bank president kindly transfer fifty thousand to the bank at St. Nazaire? She and Prince Mdivani would be there for some time.

He was a stolid man with a tight straight mouth and sandy hair. He looked more like a Southern California halfback than a French banker; his eyes always twinkled good-naturedly for "Madame" and he hurried away briskly on her business. He was gone a while. She sat beside his desk, thinking of their new life in the pink palace.

"Madame," the banker said, clearing his throat gravely, "I regret to say you have virtually no money left in the account."

"Oh, there's some mistake," she said. "I'm quite sure I transferred four hundred and fifty thousand before Prince Mdivani and I left the states."

"Yes, Madame, and it has been drawn."

He showed her the account record. There was less than two thousand dollars left.

Her face flamed. It was so silly to be embarrassed this way, there was plenty of money at home, investments, real estate. She cabled for funds. The bank cabled back advising her to return and handle her finances personally. They were not satisfied with the real-estate manager either.

"David, I must go back to America and check financial matters." She said it lightly, stroking his hair, sitting on the arm of his chair, her voice barely audible because money was embarrassing.

"We are out of money? I go to work," he said, jumping up briskly.

"What work, David?"

"You do not go away."

"Darling, you *can* come with me, we can take the baby and the nurse; but I'll only stay a few days. I'll just slip over, talk with the bankers and get us some money."

David was sulky at dinner. When Russie asked him what was the matter, he said:

"*She* wants to go to America. Without me."

All eyes turned.

"I don't wish to go, my bankers insist."

"You are too independent!" David cried. He rose, smashed his wine glass, and left the room. Her heart was shaking.

The father shouted after him but David did not come back.

Charles Huberich said, "It is not like America. Mae, in Europe the man is head of the house."

"I see certain things in David I do not like," the father said through Russie. "I have myself been a strict, unyielding man. I ordered my wife not to smoke and that wasn't enough, I hid in a closet to make sure I was obeyed!"

Russie looked amazed but the father said yes, she must translate what he said. "Poor Lily. She would never have died but for me. She died of my coldness."

Russie argued but he motioned her to go on, go on.

"She lay all through the night waiting for me to give her one word and I gave her none. She died of a broken heart."

He wept. "I do not wish David to be as I have been." He sat down to write a letter to David. Then he thought of something else and Russie quickly picked up his rapid speech:

"He was brought up as I was, by orderlies and valets, in an Oriental world where men are treated like gods."

"David is my god," Mae said simply, "and so is our son. But we're out of money and I must go home."

She went, although David was distraught to the last. He wouldn't leave the ship when the warning bell sounded.

"David, these are just a few days out of a lifetime."

"You are my breath," he cried. "I am a man."

"And I a woman and there are two things a woman must have, Davey, you taught me—a lover and a child. I'll be back soon."

He left, finally, and Mae waved until his head was blurred in the distance.

That night she walked the shadowy deck alone, the first time she'd been alone for two years. She checked her watch. The baby was asleep, David was listening to the news broadcast. Already she missed them unbearably.

The next day was her birthday, May 7. She was surprised to remember. With David, one day was like another, full of buoyancy and life. She cut a sprig of lily of the valley, tucked it in her suit lapel and emerged to stroll the deck and breathe fresh sea air.

"Mae Murray!" cried a man in a tweed cap. "You are Mae Murray, where have you been?"

"In a dream," she started to say, checked herself. "In Europe."

"My wife is your most enthusiastic fan. I'd say I was but she might hear me." He chuckled, pleased with himself, and she laughed too going on briskly down the deck, nodding, smiling to people who recognized her.

"Your *Merry Widow*, we saw it four times!" The women were from Kansas, could they have her autograph? She chatted with strangers as she hadn't in years. A thousand thoughts went racing through her head. Four hundred thousand dollars, she thought abruptly; that's a great deal of money! That can't go on forever. She'd earned nothing in two years and spent—what in the world was she thinking of? The salt air seemed to shock her to her senses, and being away from David's hypnotic hold made her see clearly. She was back in the world.

It wasn't too surprising, when she'd crossed the ocean and the country, to find her bankers grim.

What was being used now was principal, not interest. They felt very strongly that she must not liquidate her holdings. She'd earned nothing for two years and to purchase that pink palace in France would cost a fortune. They also distrusted the manager she'd left in charge. He had been stealing, they were sure of it.

Mae went back to the hotel stunned. She read a wire from a New York booking agent, offering her a dance tour, twenty

weeks salary and percentage. Yes, of course, she must dance. She phoned David in Paris, explaining, their liquid resources were exhausted, the bankers did not want her to disturb her investments, if she could go on tour she could recoup what they'd spent, then they could live on the interest of her holdings, in Europe, as he wished.

"It's such luck to get this offer, David. Tell me you agree. Davey?"

He slammed down the receiver.

14



After several more phone calls, David agreed to come. He was devastated, she was his wife, royalty, she should not work. He had failed her. He was perfectly sincere. He had lived in a world where women did not work and royalty lived like royalty. It had never occurred to David that Mae would defy him. But Mae felt it would be all right once he was with her.

She counted the days until he and the baby would leave Paris, cross the Atlantic, proceed on the roundabout way through Canada to avoid publicity. Everything was ready, a spacious house on San Vincente in Santa Monica, a tennis court for David, a walled garden for the baby and to watch over them, the statue of the baby Jesus on which she'd outbid Mr. Hearst. There was imported delicatessen in the pantry and cook roasted a turkey and a ham so that David could raid the icebox late at night. Locomotive wheels were turning, every turn was bringing nearer her other self.

Then one day Mae came home after a round of rehearsals and costume fittings and flew across the garden to his arms. Her baby had changed in eight weeks; he seemed taller, his

curls had been clipped, his round cherubic eyes gazed at her blankly for a moment as if they didn't see. Then he heard her voice and his small face broke into a smile; he wrapped his arms about her neck, he buried his head in the hollow near her shoulder.

"Darling little rabbit, are you my rabbit?"

David raised her to her feet. "I am famished for you," he said, holding her close. Koran clung to their legs.

"David, it's no fun being away from you."

He shrugged. "But you have been dancing."

Yes, every day, and it was going well. Publix was giving Mae whatever she wished: twenty-four dancers, comics, jugglers, four partners, for the waltz, the tango, the rhythm number, the *pasa doble*.

David dropped his arms. "It makes me sick at heart, you should be in my house."

"The theatre is alive for me, David. Don't grieve. I'm glad to dance and I have my plans. You and Koran shall come on to me between tours, we'll have charming vacations as we did in Europe. We'll have a wonderful week now before the opening in San Francisco."

He continued to sulk.

"We have no choice, darling. We need the money. We need to be fluid again, then we can live on our interest and be as free as we like. That crooked manager has let the properties run down. All must be built up again, David. Absentee ownership doesn't work."

"I take over," he said. "I manage everything."

"David, would you? What a good idea! We wouldn't have to trust anyone outside. I could concentrate on work!"

She'd never dreamed that David would want to put up with business details, but it was an inspiration. He would be kept busy, and he'd feel like the head of the house. They had a week of flawless happiness. David watched while six trunks of costumes were packed, carefully, so that lace and ruffles would hang smooth. Pressing and steaming destroy materials; wrin-

cling should be avoided. Mae showed him the special trunks with partitions for her shoes, binders for headdresses, the exquisite white bird of paradise, she tried it on and he kissed her while feathers framed her face.

David insisted on driving her to the train and they talked avidly all the way. Fragments of sunset lit the sunset sky. When they reached the station, he stepped on the accelerator and zoomed right past!

"David, we've passed the station."

"You are not going. I have changed my mind."

A sense of alarm went through her, her fists clenched, but Mae kept her voice steady and very calm. "Darling, it's just for two weeks. I'll be home before going east, we must turn back this moment to catch the train." They passed a clock. They had just five minutes. "I have never failed to keep an engagement."

"You are my wife. You're not going to show off your flesh to the gaping crowd."

"David, I have beautiful costumes."

"Cut down to here!"

He was driving like a maniac now. It was train time. Hot tears gushed up, choking her. "David, I beseech you."

"Beg!" he said.

She didn't understand at first, then she slipped quickly to the floor. "David, I beg of you."

He laughed but he turned back. Five minutes past train time. When he finally stopped, Mae jumped out and ran, through the station, down the long tunnel, onto the platform—the train was still there, its engine puffing and snorting. The conductor whisked her up the open stair and the train started to roll at once.

"How about luggage?"

Her costumes were in the baggage car but all her personal luggage was in the Rolls with David. What did it matter? They'd held the train seven minutes and she'd make San Francisco on schedule, ready for the public that awaited her.

There was a packed house on her opening night, and an air of keen anticipation. The act opened with a tango, and the audience gasped when the curtain swung open—the backdrop was of black velvet, and she stood center stage, brilliant in her dress of white ruffles, a rose-coloured gaucho hat, and rose-pink gloves. She told them first about the tango, how it was always done in a small space around a campfire. They listened, rapt. She'd sought out Madrano, who'd taught Rudy Valentino the true gaucho dance. Then she whirled with her partner, stamped to the insistent rhythm; they couldn't seem to get enough of it. She'd been booked for four shows a day. The management upped it to five, opened early, closed late, cut the newsreel in half, cut the travelogue altogether. Over the week end there were six shows a day. At the end of each performance, she'd come out before the curtain and make a little speech. "Feel that I'm reaching out to you, feel that I'm shaking your hand, be happy!" she told them.

Stepping back inside the curtain she'd hear the thunder of their applause. It was something to hold on to. She put David's strange conduct out of mind. Every night she phoned him and Koran, told them good night, she loved them, and God bless them. There must be no more discord between them. Poor David did not understand. He loved her and couldn't bear to have her out of his sight. He felt it was a disgrace for his wife to work. But dancing was part of her life, and to appear before a live audience made her feel closer to people, gave her an intimate sense of their warmth and affection. She came home from San Francisco glowing with pride. She'd been gone two years but the public hadn't forgotten.

Koran was crying, she heard him the moment she came into the house.

"He wants the light on, Madame, and of course I can't permit that," the nurse said.

Mae flew upstairs, flung the door open and took the child in her arms.

"You are never to be frightened, there is nothing to fear,

Koran. You hear me? We will leave the light on in the hall and your door open. When you are more grown up, you tell me, and we will close the door a trifle."

In the next few days she spent much time with the little boy, hired a new nurse, a skilled dietician. She explained to Koran that she must go away to dance, but she would be home soon, and her love was with him always.

"You talk to him as if he could understand," laughed David.

"He will. He does already a little. Look at those eyes. There must be no shadows between us three, all must be trust."

She didn't mention the crazy drive to the train station. That was a thing of the past. David was going with her to New York. This time he drove right to the station and took her into their drawing room; when the door was shut it seemed the safest, most hidden of sanctuaries. This was how marriage should be, two against the world.

David sat in the fifth row at the Paramount Theatre, watching rehearsal. Mae wore the black velvet gown and the paradise plumes in her hair (for David, she didn't want him to see her in rehearsal clothes); her partner, William Moffa, was a graceful dancer—dark, a bit like Gilbert. Here there was no Von Stroheim, no one to spoil her pleasure in dancing. She looked to David to share her pleasure, but he sat slumped in his seat, his face long. She whispered, "Bill, let's stop, just for a minute," and ran down into the dark theatre.

"David, you're bored to death. Don't sit around in this gloomy theatre. You have friends in New York. See them, have fun. Then pick me up after the theatre and I'll show you *my* New York."

Five shows a day, sometimes six. Crowds began lining up at eight in the morning. The huge movie house was packed; they had to ask the audiences to be good sports and leave after they'd seen the show once. Her take would be \$25,000 that week. It was exhilarating, but strenuous too. The masseuse gave her skilled care, the dietician prepared simple meals of

fruit, vegetables and cottage cheese. Her food must be kept light, egg yolks whipped in a glass of orange juice, grated vegetables with lemon and honey; proteins and minerals would keep her fresh and elastic. Mae was at the theatre from ten in the morning until twelve at night, sometimes one; but David was waiting and she'd emerge like a butterfly from the drab, darkened backstage area. They went to night clubs, David ordered magnums of champagne and talked passionately across the table. They'd get to bed very late, and he constantly wakened her in the night.

"David, if you love me, let me sleep. I do five shows tomorrow."

"You deny my manhood!"

He imposed his will on her, but it couldn't go on. Mae had to insist on separate rooms so that she could rest, but David was always at the door deploring his lost manhood. She explained over and over, she must be at the theatre at ten, if he adored her he certainly should understand. Outside the door he wept and raved. Something had come between them. Didn't she know he was a man, no sissy dancer but a man? In Europe he could have a dozen women at his feet.

"David, this tour will soon be over and we can be together as we were. We'll again want the same things at the same time."

"A wife is for her husband at all times," he insisted.

When he went back to California, he phoned constantly to declare his love. It was the sound of his voice that kept Mae going, week after week through the cross-country tour. Chicago, Omaha, Kansas City, Memphis. In Salt Lake City it was so hot that she slept in an open car at the top of the pass. They brought hundred-pound chunks of ice backstage and played fans on the stage so that she could go out and dance in a theatre that was like an incinerator. Back at the Hippodrome in New York, two months later, it was so cold she bundled up between shows in her ermine coat.

David and the baby met her in French Lick between tours.

She read to the baby and slept in David's arms and never mentioned the theatre. For Koran she bought a stuffed elephant that nodded its head and a floppy calico horse. This was her Christmas. Christmas week she'd be in Syracuse, in her other life. Once she had had *only* that other life and she was grateful now for both.

On New Year's Eve the troupe arrived in Buffalo. Two maids were readying clothes in the living room of her hotel suite, Mae had had a short nap; when she wakened and saw the time, she dashed, naked, for the bathroom for her shower. Her hand was on the knob when the hall door opened and a hand reached out—she'd have known it anywhere—and drew her into the next suite. Then she was in David's arms, but the next moment he abruptly pushed her into his bathroom and the lock clicked. She thought it was all a joke, David had come to surprise her, he couldn't bear to be away from her.

"David, darling, don't play. I haven't time, let me out. I want to talk to you."

"You have plenty time," he shouted.

As the moments passed, she grew cold all over. It was like the day they'd driven to the station and gone right past it. There was a sense of abnormality, like a clock running the wrong way.

"Darling," she said softly, shivering, "I'm cold."

"Dance," he yelled, "you're used to dancing without clothes."

It occurred to her that David had gone insane. In *Fashion Row* the man with the scar had seemed all right until he finally turned on Olga. She grabbed two Turkish towels, they were small face towels, and held them against her cold breasts.

"You go out on the stage and show your body, I know what you're doing. In my coun-try it would be a stag party."

"David, dear, dancing is an art. Come to the theatre, see what I'm doing. If we hurry, we can make the curtain."

"In my coun-try we take you by the hair."

She banged on the door. "David, I have a show to do. Neither

you nor I want undignified publicity. If I smash a window and scream for help, we'll be held up to ridicule in every tabloid in America."

No answer.

"Please, Davey. Don't spoil the life we have."

"You deny me your body and offer yourself to every man who buys a ticket at the box office."

She hadn't meant to scream, but suddenly she heard herself screaming hysterically for help. There was a sound of voices haranguing David from the hallway. He told them to go to hell.

She stood on a towel to warm her feet. She moved her knees up and down as if treading water, and rubbed her skin furiously with the little towel. Finally sirens came shrieking up the street. There was a clatter outside the window. A fireman called, "Stand back, Madam, against the wall," and crashed the glass window, while David ran into the room with a bath towel, screaming, "No one is going to see my wife." The place swarmed with people, firemen coming through the windows and hotel personnel in David's room. The engineer had had to remove the bathroom lock. David kept one arm about her neck and was waving everyone off. She was his wife! A policeman and a fireman pinned his arms back, and Mae was free. When she was ready, police took her to the theatre, where the manager was trying to placate the stomping, shouting mob.

The manager arranged for her to sleep in an apartment in the theatre building that night, with her maids. The police had escorted her husband out of town. He'd been drinking pretty heavily, they said. He probably would wonder tomorrow what it had all been about.

Maybe David wouldn't remember, but she did. She felt humiliated and debased; it would take time to wipe out the dreadful experience. There were still six more weeks left of the tour, she signed for six more, and for the first time proceeded in peace. During the outrage in Buffalo, dancing up and down in the cold bathroom trying to keep warm, it had occurred to

Mae that she might have made a mistake, that David might not be the man, the ideal husband, she'd envisioned. She must be very careful from now on. She could not be totally trusting and open and vulnerable.

But David had another surprise in store. When she was finally on her way home, he stopped the train at Barstow and presented himself in the middle of the night, a tender and contrite lover. It was very confusing. He explained that jealousy was part of a man's love. How could he stand being known about the theatre as Mae Murray's husband? Serge was in Europe with Pola; Pola was willing to give up her work. Alex was in London with Louise Van Alen. They all had a married life and what did they have, he and Mae—a married separation. He was right, of course, but what could she do?

The property at Playa del Rey had become very valuable, worth somewhere near a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Now they could build their pink palace! They could use a third of her salary for building costs, keep the other two thirds toward their liquid assets. They would have a roof of Mediterranean tile, a large garden, an olive tree from the desert. David was elated. He would supervise everything, he said. For the first time he seemed at peace and sure of her.

They pored over house plans drawn by Frank Lloyd Wright, architectural pioneer of the century. Wright believed in adapting architecture to landscape and he designed a pink stucco Moorish house that seemed to grow out of the setting. There would be four suites. Mae's dressing room, bedroom and bath would be floored in black tile, Chinese red, white and gold; the bath would be long enough so that she could swim twenty strokes, and surrounded by a bronze railing so that Koran could not fall in. On the walls great Venetian baskets would overflow with crystal. There must be lounge rooms and a gymnasium and a ballroom, Capri blue rock in the garden and Venetian tile inlays around doors and windows.

They found the house needed deep foundations, a ninety-foot bulwark against which the sea came spuming, a pier glass

wall to protect the garden. David was excited, he was busy, he was handling bales of money. Once when bonds were needed to cover a shipment of tile from Italy, Mae gave him the power of attorney. He was appeased and diverted, and she thanked God. David's redeeming virtue was passion. She had watched actors simulate it; this man had it, coupled with youth and vitality.

This mansion was to be their love cottage. They had separate suites, to insure privacy when it was wanted, rest when it was needed, but her bedroom was designed for romance, with snow-white walls, ebon-black carpets and drapes, green and scarlet Chinese silk wall hangings, a bed with 24-carat gold leaf inlay on headboard and footboard; for the bedspread, the ermine which had once been Olga Farinova's cloak in *Fashion Row*. It was the way she'd dreamed of living, more wonderful than even the *Des Artistes* because you could step out onto the sand, walk along the ocean, let the surf lull you to sleep.

One day Mae and Koran were together on the beach when a dog came charging. She liked dogs and thought nothing of it until he was quite near and she saw he was vicious. She drew the child to her and bent over him, speaking very softly, "Come let me cuddle you, come be my bunny. Koran is mama's bunny," all the while watching the dog who had started circling around them. "There is a bad dog out there, Koran, and we're pretending to be asleep and maybe he'll go away." The dog had foam on his muzzle. Her pulse beat wildly, no use to scream, the surf was too loud. No use to move, the least movement and he'd spring. Koran clung to her. Just at that moment someone let out an Indian war whoop, a young man leaped off the rocks, and the dog charged him viciously. For one horrible moment, Mae and the child huddled together. Then she heard a gun shot above the boisterous sea, and the dog lay dead. Two teen-age boys came toward her. One of them still held the gun. They helped her to her feet, Koran still clung to her, both arms tight around her neck.

"We saw you a mile off. We were surf fishing earlier and

that dog was wandering around, but we went back to the car and got the gun, and he disappeared. We didn't find him again until he started barking at you. We came quick as we could."

She could feel Koran's heart thudding, and he hadn't even whimpered. She kissed his soft tender neck. "Come back to the house, let my husband thank you. We're having people to dinner. Stay."

They helped her back to the house. She showed them the ping-pong table and the billiard room. "Dinner's at seven, I'll see you then." She stopped by the kitchen to tell cook, and to make out place cards. When the guests assembled at dinner, twenty that night, she told of the mad dog and how she and Koran had been saved, and everyone toasted the boys and made a fuss over them. "David will be down in a moment. Have some wine," she said. Had the butler seen David? The Prince had been in the dining room, he had looked over the place cards, then he had left, the butler said.

"Tell the Prince we're waiting," she said softly.

Down he came. She saw him stride across the dining room, his face distorted. He came directly to her, seized the red silk of her dress, and ripped it down the front.

"David!" she cried trying to hold the dress.

"That's what they came to see," he roared. "Your new young men," and he stalked out of the room.

"David's not well," she stammered. "I'm sorry." Their guests were shocked and unbelieving. She tried to hide her shame and humiliation, to cover up for David, but it was hard to dissemble.

It was the tour, of course. She was about to leave on another tour and David wasn't himself, he was like the mad dog. His brother Alex had told him he was under Mae's thumb. When she tried to reason with him, later that night, he whipped his hand across her face.

"Oh my God, forgive me," he cried, falling on his knees. "I am a man in love."

"If this is love, I'll take hate," she said.

Next day she left on her tour. "Keep happy," she told the audience, "dance, it will lighten your heart." But her own heart was heavy. There was no escape from a growing dread. David frightened her.

When she came home, the walls of the gym were full of bullet holes. Alex and Serge had arrived for a visit, the Mdivani boys had been trying their prowess. She also found a crystal chandelier shattered.

"We had a party," David told her casually. "Some of Alex's Russian friends. We drank a lot that night."

"I see you did. That was Venetian glass, David, priceless."

"We had better in Georgia. Always you must act as if you are used to good things. You are *nouveau riche*."

She flushed. The housekeeper and maid were shining silver in the dining room, they could hear. And they were European. So were the butler and governess. David had hired them all and they fawned on Prince Mdivani. Only the nurse was hers. She'd hired the nurse, to watch over the baby.

Serge had separated from Pola and was now living in the guest room. He constantly lay in wait to grab her as she came downstairs.

"David will kill you," she whispered.

"Oh no, I'm too big for him."

"Serge, I can't stand you! Keep your hands off me." She begged David to make Serge stay away.

"He has his own apartment, but he's lonely, he is my brother."

And someday there'll be a murder in this house when you find out, she thought.

She made up her mind to get rid of the gun, if she ever found it. One day she pulled open a drawer in David's desk, and there lay a huge Mauser. She picked it up carefully and threw it in the sea.

David was furious at the loss of the gun. There was another argument and another ultimatum. He wanted money to drill for oil. Oil was being found all about them in Playa del Rey, it was possible to lease land and drill. With a hundred or two

hundred thousand, he and Serge could go into business. To David's way of thinking, here was the chance for him to use his knowledge of oil and establish a fortune; he could take over as head of the family and support her. But Mae didn't trust Serge. Look what he'd done with Pola's money. She didn't say no, but she stalled for time.

There was a business deal pending. John Stahl, whom she'd known when he was directing at MGM, and who had just directed Irene Dunne in *Cimarron*, was going into independent production and had acquired the rights to *Peacock Alley*. He begged Mae to play her original role in this new talking version. Mae didn't believe in remakes, but there were many happy associations with the title, her good friend Carey Wilson was doing the screen play, and it would mean she could stay at home and not take another tour. It seemed a good idea.

She came back from her meeting with Stahl to find the house empty. The crystal chandeliers made a light clink as she ran upstairs calling Koran. No answer. "Davey?"

The nurse stumbled out of her room, crying. "Oh Madame, he doesn't know I'm here. I hid in the closet. He has taken the child away. The butler and cook are gone for the day, he gave them all the day off."

She hurried to Koran's room. The calico horse was gone, and the child's hat and coat, a few playsuits. She was frantic. Serge came by an hour later. David would bring back the baby when she agreed to give them money for the oil well.

She waited in the empty house for three days and three endless nights. She kept telling herself that David was the baby's father, he loved him and wouldn't harm him. But there were two Davids, the ardent, insatiable lover, and the spoiled, vengeful man. So far as she was concerned she was through with them both. She would give him a reasonable amount of money and get a divorce. She couldn't sleep, and spent the nights pacing the empty palace, the abode of love. At midnight the third night, the phone rang and she ran to it. David wanted to know if she was ready to do as he asked?

"David, yes, yes, bring me my baby!"

15



The baby's face was dirty, his clothes were mussed, but he was fine, he was sleepy; she lugged him up the stairs, heavy as he was, and sat in the rocking chair, hugging his solid four-year-old body to her. All that mattered was to have him back.

In *The French Doll*, when she was trying to sell fake antiques to help her family, Mae pretended that she had the bed of Marie Antoinette in the Temple and had enacted the whole scene when the guards took away her little Louis Charles. Of all Marie Antoinette had borne, the cruelest blow was having them take away her son, not leaving him with her in imprisonment. But Mae hadn't known then what it was like to hug close the living thing you'd made.

Finally, she laid Koran on his bed and knelt to undress him. He never wakened while she pulled off his shirt and little pants; his lips moved as if he wanted to speak, but only a small whistle sounded as he sucked in air. He slept, snuggled into his warm nightsuit, in the familiar bed. Kneeling, she rested her head beside his. Once he sighed and flung his arm about her.

When she finally came down, David was fixing a tray of cold cuts and fresh bread. He had a bottle of champagne under one arm, the ice bucket was waiting.

"I am hungry, come, eat with me. This baby-sitting is strenuous business, eh?"

She sat down quietly on a high-backed chair, nibbled a piece of bread, sipped a little wine. But she didn't say a word.

"Here, let me butter that, you look hungry, My. Now, about the oil well."

"Yes, David?"

"You are stubborn. Don't you see, I only use your money, I'll repay you a thousand times. Oil comes gushing in, we will have a fortune, I can give you everything." He munched bread and ham, took a mighty swig of champagne.

She must be restrained. Koran was the pawn and she must be careful.

"When my father spoke, my mother obeyed, he was head of the house. A woman wants this."

"Women don't want cruelty, David."

"I must be a man. I can't let you make me a eunuch."

"To get this much money would mean selling properties."

"We could drill right on *this* property if you want," and he sprawled back insolently on the couch.

"Have a dirty well beside our home? I'd rather sell all the other real estate."

"Good," he said, "we take care of that tomorrow."

He mustn't see she was confused or frightened. She held herself very straight on the chair, knees together.

"You will take care of it, David. I am spending tomorrow with John Stahl, a director I knew from MGM. He wants to star me in his production of *Peacock Alley*." And she'd do it, she decided then and there. She couldn't leave Koran to go on tour, she'd stay right here and make a talking picture even if she didn't quite like the idea of a remake, even if her instinct said *no*.

And it wasn't right, not from the first day. She had striking

costumes and Cugat's band; Jason Robards was an excellent vis-à-vis and the sound stage was kept quiet, the way she'd always liked. But something was wrong; it was as if the confusion in her personal life was with her on the set. The camera stood rigid in its soundproof case (the noise hindered the sound track.) The mike hung rigid in front of her. She couldn't move. It was all talk talk talk, no motion until her final dance in color. "Sound has changed things," the director said.

Before the week was out, she was asking Stahl to please let her buy her way out of the picture. It was nothing like her original *Peacock Alley*, she wasn't happy about it. Mr. Stahl wasn't happy either. He hadn't slept for three nights. Louis Mayer had threatened that Stahl would never be able to release the picture, that he'd be squeezed out of any further financial backing for his films *if* he insisted on using Mae Murray. Mr. Mayer finally had agreed to this one picture.

"Why in the world should Mr. Mayer be against me?" She really didn't understand.

"Mae, you walked out of MGM in the middle of a contract. I didn't know that. They sold pictures of yours to exhibitors and those pictures were never delivered. They say you're unreliable. Don't prove it, don't walk out on me now."

She felt completely humiliated. She had been in love, and for once had let her heart rule her reason; perhaps she could explain to Mr. Mayer now. He refused to see her. Of course she couldn't leave Stahl. *Peacock Alley* went on. Between scenes, she hurried to her dressing room to rest; the public would be waiting to hear her voice, it must not tremble. There were dramatic sequences, she was a showgirl desired by two men; the director lauded her but it was an empty triumph. She was being punished for falling in love. She wrote to Mr. Mayer. When the picture was finished, she went at once to see him. His secretary, Ida Coverman, was very firm. Mr. Mayer would not see Miss Murray, and there was no one else to turn to. The reviews of the picture were excellent. "Mae

Murray comes through 100 per cent as a talking artist... she delightfully dominates this charming love story." But she couldn't work.

David and Serge had struck oil, they were busy and in high spirits, reinvesting their money on the way to a fortune. Success made David a different man. He was the princely host now, proud to show off his wife and his house, even letting her dance with the other guests. He ordered wines from France, Spain and Chile, all the dry champagnes they loved; and orchestras came down to fill the seascape with persuasive music.

One evening Lowell Sherman and his wife were among the dancers. Lowell had made a deal with RKO to act and direct; he wouldn't take no for an answer, Mae must appear with him in pictures.

"Sure," David said, "good."

But Stahl had been threatened, he'd had to eat humble pie to get money for his picture, she warned Lowell.

"I have my own money in this. Let's chance it," he said.

The picture was *Bachelor Apartment*; it offered a role different from anything Mae had done, a sophisticated Park Avenue wife with an eye for suave, eligible Lowell who loves the ladies but eludes them. Working with Lowell as director was exciting. He was using cameras on *wheels*, he wasn't relying on one static microphone but had mikes all over the set. Fluidity was back in his hands almost as it had been before talkies came in.

"I'm not going to give you any song and dance about talking pictures," he said. "Some people are so panicky about their voices, they've forgotten how to act, forgotten about pantomime. Their performance looks like an elocution lesson. Luckily, you always used your voice and your hands and everything else God gave you. Go right ahead. Be as naughty and capricious as you want."

Irene Dunne played the good girl, Mae the vivacious temptress; between them Lowell was scintillating. When it came to

the scene where secretary Dunne comes up to the apartment on business and to shock her the temptress throws open the door from the bedroom, emerging in a very diaphanous, gold lace peignoir—the crew barely waited until the assistant director called “*Cut*,” before bursting into wolf whistles and applause. The same thing happened when the picture was shown in theatres. David walked out the night they saw it at Loew’s Downtown.

But Lowell was delighted, and cast her as the guileless-looking vixen of the stage hit *High Stakes*, in which he’d see her through her gold-digger’s plot to snag all of his brother’s money. He himself played a chronic, good-natured inebriate, and Mae for the second time was the villainess who does not get her man. They were in production and doing famously when the studio manager, a Mr. Schnitzer, returned from Europe. Lowell introduced him on the set, and Schnitzer watched a scene where Mae was enticing her elderly husband in a negligee of satin almost the color of her hair.

The next day disaster struck. Mayer and his crowd had gotten to Schnitzer. It was the same story.

“You’re not the only one on the black list, Mae, but you’re one of the biggest stars,” Lowell said. “Damn these SOB’s and their petty animosities. They’re not going to let you work anywhere in pictures. These big boys control the money that controls production, and because of their own pictures they have a lever to control the theatres. But I have a plan. When I finish here, and I’ve only two more to do, you and I will make some pictures in England and release them on the continent. You’re big in Europe; so am I. We’ll be our own producers, free to do as we please for once, and we’ll make good, adult pictures without worrying about the Hays office.”

“Lowell, do you mean it!”

“Of course I mean it. You fought for me once, don’t you remember, all the way to Zukor, wasn’t it?”

“You were right for the part.”

“And you’re right for this part. No bigoted little business

moguls should be able to muzzle you. They shouldn't be able to dictate to me either. It's my money. We'll regard today as the beginning of something new. To our venture in Europe!"

She was able to finish the picture without a sense of defeat this time. Lowell was a powerful ally, and something bright lay ahead. While he completed his commitments, she began preparations for Europe. In England, Koran would need heavy clothing. It was fun to take him shopping like a proper mother, ordering shoes and sweaters and snow clothes in his size and a size larger to grow on. How the child grew! She watched him run on the beach with his sturdy legs, watched him practice at the piano. He was taking lessons and his small fingers moved gently and precisely, splayed out to reach a chord, not like a child's bang-bang. He had a precocious gravity too.

When Alex arrived from Europe and the brothers were greeting each other jovially, she saw Koran's grave, observant little face, watching them. It suddenly occurred to her that Alex, Dave and Serge neither liked nor trusted each other. They were held together by something other than affection, like three actresses at the same studio, mutually friendly in public, but deep in their hearts always on guard against a knife in the back.

It was an uncomfortable intuition. After lunch, she left them and went downtown. She suddenly needed shoes, needed to go to the library.

"She gets a kick out of the crowds," David said. "Everybody knows her, they come rushing up and she loves that, loves having them *oh* and *ah* over her."

"They are my friends," she said quickly. "They're with me."

She went out to the car and the chauffeur backed down the driveway and headed north. It was a memorable day. The sky, usually so bland and blue, was piled with thick white clouds. "If I had a ladder I'd climb up and eat them," Koran had said. They looked like masses of whipped cream. There were some thunderheads too, angry-looking over the mountains.

Mae dreaded this visit of Alex's. Everything had been calm

for a while but Alex would stir things up. He hated women and he influenced David and Serge. Alex was just that much more reckless, that much more debonair, and they followed his lead. But why was she so frightened?

"Madam, did you want something?" the chauffeur said, stopping.

"Yes, I want to go home. I've forgotten some... papers. Thank you."

How had the chauffeur known? Intuition too? It was as if he guessed how troubled she was. Her heart was hammering, she could scarcely sit still. She must get home. Please drive faster, she asked the chauffeur. How silent the patio had been the day Koran disappeared. Mae ran across it now, remembering. Not silent this time, a great roar of laughter filled the hallway. She leaned against the wall.

"Here's to David's bride," laughed Alex in the salon, "and to the original oil company."

"And here's to Mae and the new oil company she knows nothing about," laughed Serge. "I'll say this, her name has draw. You tell the suckers she's back of it and they can't wait to lay their dollars on the dotted line."

Shock glued her to the wall.

"You're sure she knows nothing about this stock issue?" said Alex.

"Nothing. She doesn't ask many questions. She's been working in pictures."

"That's the way to do it, Davey. Marry 'em young and tell 'em nothing."

There was the clink of glasses. Through a haze, she heard something about Barbara Hutton and Barbara's fortune. Within three months, Alex said, he'd be divorced from Louise Van Alen and married to Barbara.

Serge said, "I don't know how you do it, Alex. You have a way with women."

"And you'd better have. Dave and I keep the family going."

"Who knows," Serge laughed, "I may marry Van Alen myself. It's a good family."

"We should sell them stock in the new oil company." This from David.

"We don't need them. There are plenty of suckers dying to invest in a Mae Murray oil well. We'll clear twenty million!"

She could stand no more. She rushed into the room. David dropped his glass and jumped to his feet. Alex and Serge rose slowly.

"I'll give you three days," she cried. "*Three days* to bring me the papers on this oil deal. If you're swindling the public I'll expose you if it's the last thing I ever do!"

They were guilty, you could see it. She trembled from head to toe for the trusting people who believed in her. "I'll expose you, you hear? You'll not harm anyone or damage my name. Now get out!" She ran up the stairs to her own apartment. She locked the door and leaned against it.

David tried the knob, he pounded on the wood panel.

"I've said what I have to say, David. You'll refund that money. Get Alex and Serge out of my house."

"Who in the hell do you think you *are*?" he yelled.

"Mae Murray." She even pulled herself up a little taller against the door. Beholden to no one for name or title.

She phoned her lawyer, and told him about it briefly.

"Why didn't you come to me long ago?" he said.

This then, was what the brothers had in common. They moved together like a broom, sweeping the fortunes of gullible women before them. She must cable Barbara Hutton and warn her. She must get in touch with Louise Van Alen. It was all perfectly clear.

David denied it. He came to her door that night. He swore, on the honor of his dead mother, that he loved her, that he wanted only to lay the wealth of the world at her feet. It didn't matter how he got it! David was telling the truth but Mae wouldn't listen, she couldn't believe him.

He went away. Then suddenly the whole house exploded! He had shot the lock out of the thick oak door, and stood in the open doorway with the gun. Mae started to run, he caught and dragged her across the hall to his rooms.

"You are my wife," he yelled. "You drive me crazy with your haughty ways."

He held the big gun at her heart and she felt nothing. She looked him in the eye as if he were someone she'd met on the set, an actor who overacted badly. His eyes shifted and she felt, at the same instant, a small weight leaning against her. David's eyes widened, he threw the gun across the room and fell at her feet. Looking frightened and bewildered, Koran took her hand. David was kissing her feet, like an abject slave. Holding her hand, the boy led her across the hall, into her own room, to her bed. She sank down without a word. He crawled in beside her, nestled against her, patted her comfortingly with his little hands.

She didn't see David for three days. The lawyer explained to Mae that she had no evidence, nothing in writing, no authority whatever, since she wasn't involved in this stock deal. When she met David, finally, she knew what must be done.

"David, I want a divorce. I'll see that you have a suitable sum of money, whatever you need. Then Koran and I are going to Europe. I'm going to make pictures with Lowell Sherman."

He started laughing. "You have nothing," he laughed. "Not a cent, my dear Bubi."

What was he talking about?

"As I said, you have nothing. I put it all in my account long ago. You gave me power of attorney. We are married very Catholic, I want you to be my wife forever. Everything in my name is safer, even in anger you stay with me." The bank verified it. She had nothing.

"I will give you some money, a little," he laughed. "If you ask me nicely."

Holding herself tight together, not looking at him, she said,

"I will need passage to Europe next month. Lowell Sherman..."

"Died today. You should read the papers!"

She ran out of the room so that he should not see her cry. Blindly, she stumbled across the beach, dropping to her knees in the cold sand. Poor Lowell, fine sensitive man. He was dead, and she was in desperate peril. Honor had always been the greatest value, David was stripping her even of that. If she went to the press, tore the masks from the Mdivani oil operations, she would also be turning her child's name over to public scandal. She'd given David money to distribute all over Georgia, she'd done five, six shows a day in the heat of Utah, built him his pink palace, and kept him like a king, and he was dirt. The lowliest peasant in Georgia was more honorable, more of a man than David.

She lay shivering on the beach. The complete awakening had been a long time coming. Now it left her numb with pain. Once in her whole life she'd given herself wholly to a man, she'd loved being a woman or she'd have seen through David long ago. After a while, she made her way back to the house, and began to plan. She called a furrier, sold her ermine and sable coats; then she took the nurse into her confidence. It was very urgent that she slip away to New York for a week or ten days. She trusted the nurse with Koran. He was to be fed always fruits, milk, nuts, vegetables.

In New York she checked in at the St. Moritz and got in touch with the theatrical booking agent who'd first offered her a tour. Two days later she received a telegram: HIRE CAR MEET ME AT AIRPORT DAVID. Instead she went to the Metropolitan Museum to see the Rodin sculptures, the Spanish paintings, the Cellini cup. That night he was, of course, hammering on her door, pleading, "Bubi, my father is dead." He was here on the way to Paris for the funeral and she must come too.

"We have a child, David, what do we do with him?"

"He is all right in California with the nurse."

"Who is even going to pay the nurse, David?"

He burst again into a paroxysm of tears for his father, who had died in exile, without seeing his coun-try. She cried too—but for the moment when they had first arrived in Paris and their whole life lay before them.

"We will begin a new life together, I swear it," David said. "There will be a splendid funeral and you must be there beside me. What will the world think?"

"I don't care what the world thinks. I care very much how I feel. You have let Alex and Serge mold you into their pattern, you're not at all the man who swept me off my feet."

David tried to rectify that at once. He took her to dinner at the Colony every night, sent her boxes of gardenias, introduced her right and left as "my wife, Princess Mdivani." He ordered her moved to a suite at the St. Moritz and he spent every night there although his clothes were with Serge at the Waldorf. He kept urging her to go with him to Europe, and she tried to soften him, to get back some of the money she'd earned, talk sensibly about divorce. He only laughed. He would never consent to a divorce, she would remain his wife. "I can sue for one, David, you have struck me, you have destroyed my possessions, you have not behaved like a husband."

"No one will believe you, Bubi. You don't believe it yourself. You can have all the money you want, when you act like my wife."

Finally the funeral could be held up no longer, David left. He also left the hotel bill. "You are the great Mae Murray, what is a hotel bill to you?"

She visited a psychiatrist to ask about David and he tried to explain a number of things: in falling in love with David, she had imagined that he was exactly like herself. It was a common error among lovers, and it couldn't be less true. They were nothing alike. Their environments were totally different, he'd been raised a Eurasian in a very virile environment with luxuries so common they could be despised. There is a certain hypnotism where money is concerned. David obviously thought *her* insane when she called him dishonest. In having the use

of money some people come to feel it is theirs, especially a man who in Europe would have been given a bride complete with large dowry. He was an insecure man because of his father's early severity, because of the loss of country and exalted place. "His one security is possessing you," the doctor told her. "Unfortunately, if you stay with him long enough, he'll probably destroy you. You're lucky he hasn't already done so."

Mae only half understood. Her wide eyes filled slowly, as they had for so many close-ups. "The sad part, doctor, is that I still love him."

"Have you ever read *Green Mansions*? You resemble Rima, I think. You live in a world of your own."

She read *Green Mansions* on the train going home (the agent loaned her the train fare). Of course she was Rima, who had fallen in love with a mortal and had paid with her life. Of all the doctor had said, she understood that much.

She found a lawyer in the phone book; she could no longer afford her old lawyer. Perhaps this one would be young and hungry, and unused to the huge fees a movie star could pay.

"I am a lost person," she told him. "I desperately need to be free."

16



How quiet it was now in the pink palace. In the surrounding silence, the sea made the only sound; day and night Mae heard the waves breaking against the shore. It seemed as if they were washing away all that had been, all her past life. Mae and the nurse and Koran were alone in the house, the other servants had gone and good riddance. They lived in a pause, surrounded by the lonely sea.

To raise immediate cash the new young lawyer brought in a furniture dealer. He was a dealer in antiques and stars' furnishings who ran big auctions and ads in the papers; but he was an oily, greedy man like the lowest procurers in the dens of Limehouse when she was making *Idols of Clay*. He swaggered from room to room, looking over treasures Mae and David had collected in Europe, turning his sneering face from one lovely piece to another, touching this or that with the tip of his cane, disparaging each object so that his eventual offer would seem less outlandish. He was a miserable, grossly ignorant man, sneering at a baroque table with a rare marble top, poking his stick at a seventeenth-century Venetian mirror.

"No one wants this kind of stuff. Old-fashioned," he re-

marked, shrugging well-tailored shoulders. He was from Beverly Hills, this one. "All the smart set is going for modern." He called it *moderne*. "What do you want for it?"

"These things are not for sale," she said quietly. "The objects in several other rooms *are*. In this room, for example."

He walked about David's room, touching everything with his cane. The door to the closet was open. The cane flicked down a handsome tweed cap David had worn in Switzerland.

"Now this I could use for my golf game," he chortled, tilting his head coyly, about to try it on.

"Don't touch that to your head! Select the furniture you want and go quickly!"

His black beady eyes sharpened and he got down to business, bought the dining room suite and the magnificent golden oak bedroom suite Serge had used so casually.

"Your guests like to smoke in bed, I see." His stick found the cigarette burn Serge had left on a bedside table once used in a ducal boudoir.

He chose a few other pieces too and offered seven thousand dollars for the entire lot. The furniture was worth easily fifty times as much. Mae flinched as if he had tapped *her* with his stick, but she wanted him out of the house; she wouldn't bargain with him.

"It doesn't matter. Yes," she blurted. "Hurry, please. I'm pressed for time." Stuffing the check in her purse, almost before it was dry, she fled upstairs. The tweed cap was still on the floor. She replaced it carefully on the top shelf.

Up from his nap, Koran came running down the hall. He and the nurse were going down for milk and graham crackers.

"May Mommy have some too?" She took his hand and they went down to the kitchen.

"Who was that man we heard talking?"

"He was buying furniture. We have so much and we really don't need it. We do need a little extra money." She had cabled David again and again, like a petitioner pleading for some money that belonged to her. He must realize she and the child

had to eat, while he was spending a fortune on a funeral. For the most part he didn't answer. Once he cabled: BEHAVE AND YOU HAVE EVERYTHING. He and Serge were being detained in Europe, it was four months now, something to do with visas.

"It's nothing to worry about, Koran. We can always earn some money and you are my helper, you stand beside me"—as he had that awful night when David's gun was at her heart. He had slipped past nurse and governess, to come to her. Help came when you needed it.

A young Chinese knocked at the kitchen door.

"I hear around you don't have a chauffeur," he said.

"I haven't much money either."

He smiled agreeably. "Name of Won," he said. "You have a beautiful car out there. It should have care. You have a nice little runabout, too, I can use that for errands. Many things to serve you."

"What comes to my door is for me," she said softly.

"My former employer lost his money in the stock-market crash. Another employer lost everything in a bank failure. Many are in trouble right now. Can you pay me at all?"

And she was in trouble—not from any stock-market crash either. She had never bought stock. Hers was another sort of crash.

"I will pay you, Won. Come to think of it, if you can help me with some trunks in the ballroom, we may find buried treasure."

It was a gay procession that she led through the house, with Koran, the nurse and Won behind her. To amuse the child she made it seem like a treasure hunt. They switched on lights as they went, for it was growing dark and it had begun to rain. They heard raindrops pattering on the window panes. They marched upstairs, and Mae flicked switches that sent lights bursting into the crystal chandeliers in the ballroom.

Won was slight but strong; he juggled the big trunks until he freed the one she wanted. It was unlocked, the lid creaked

back, she took out an armful of books saved from her childhood.

Here's a treasure. "Koran, these are for you. Look. 'Wynken, Blynken and Nod one night, Sailed off in a wooden shoe, Sailed on a river of crystal light, Into a sea of dew.'"

His small mouth formed the words with her; he gave her a bite of graham cracker.

"We'll read more in a little while, yes, I promise. But now we have to hunt some more."

There were pictures and clippings, the tearsheet from Hearst's Sunday Supplement of the young Ziegfeld beauty with her kittens.

"Why doesn't Papa like kittens? Why can't I have a kitten?"

"Oh that Ziegfeld," the nurse said, "he knows how to put on the shows, doesn't he, Madam?"

Won was looking at stills of dozens of movie heroines, all dressed in magnificent glitter, all poised and ready for the camera. In the corner of the trunk Mae's hand closed on a tissue paper package. Out of it fell a cascade of cabachons, rubies and emeralds. How could she have forgotten about them? Here was treasure indeed!

"You see, Won, you will be paid," Mae said.

But the money from the jewels didn't last long; neither did the money from the furniture. There were too many bills, the pink palace *was* expensive to run. David was back from Europe, living in Beverly Hills in a costly apartment. He'd been served, as he came off the boat, with divorce papers. He laughed at them. He'd tried to get back in the house, but all the locks had been changed. The lawyer saw him constantly and got nowhere. No property settlement, no divorce; David wanted his wife back.

The Rolls Royce went, more furniture went, time went. Electricity had been shut off in the pink palace. The lawyer said let it be. This was one way of showing her need. The gas was turned off, the phone, the water. The nurse had to go,

there just wasn't enough food; and the former gardener took Koran to visit at his house in Santa Monica. He had children of his own; Koran was in safe hands until Mae could get money.

"You realize, all you'd have to do is let the press know, invite reporters down here, let them see. You can get the greatest publicity in the world," the lawyer said.

"I wouldn't dream of it! I wouldn't let anyone know. I have some pride in my good name. And we have a child who must be protected." She would have grown angry with the young man, but he *was* young, he was trying to help her, he *had* taken the case on a contingency fee.

It was strange in the empty palace. The rains had ended and Mae opened the windows wide for the air to sweep through. Much of the furniture was gone, but Won kept the place immaculate. He was an amazing man, he utilized each small thing for a large need. In the garage were bottles of Puritas water; this he used for cooking and cleaning. He made tea over a spirit lamp, he caught fish on the beach and cooked them over a brush fire. He traded canned goods for bread, eggs and oranges. And his smiling face made everything seem like a game, as if they were camping out.

When Sarah Bernhardt's apartment had burned in the Rue Auber her managers had given her a benefit, fellow actors and actresses had offered their talents gladly, the great Patti had sung, and young Sarah had been able to pay all her debts. What might have happened if some night a bevy of Hollywood celebrities had descended on Playa del Rey in best bibs and tuckers with Louella and the other writers in tow—and found Mae Murray sitting beside a small fire on the beach while Won cooked a fish he had caught?

When guests finally came, they were Nina Huberich and her husband, the international lawyer. Their knock at the door sounded loud on the empty beach. Won went to the house and came back to report friends had arrived with a basket of food.

They had come to advise her to give up this useless fight. David would never accede to a divorce; if they resumed their marriage, he'd give her half the money. Her money. He'd keep Serge and Alex away from the house. The Huberichs talked all night; but her answer was *no*. At daybreak, Won showed the visitors out. He had sat up, waiting in the kitchen; he threw the basket of food they'd brought into the trash.

"I want no more visitors, Won. Whoever comes now, tell them I'm not at home."

But the next visitor did not knock. He smashed the dressing room window and threw himself onto Mae's bed before she could move in her sleep. She fought him with all her strength.

"It will be as before," he gasped, "let me show you. My!"

She twisted away, he caught her, they were both breathless. If she could only reach the intercom switch, signal Won in the servants' house! She rolled across, dug her fingers on the button, and heard only a dull click. There was no electricity! She fell off the bed and scrambled to her feet; he was after her; he weighed a thousand pounds, this devil. He lurched into the dressing table.

"Be careful of Baby Jesus!"

David's swinging arm sent everything flying. He caught her, carried her to the bed and fell with her.

"It will be like always, you are my wife!"

She kicked as hard as she could. He caught her ankle, pinioned it, rolled hard on top of her, and drove in like the Terrible Turk.

The weight was exhausting. She blacked out. The next thing she knew, Won was bending over her. His startled round face was pale. A raised shovel was in his hands.

"Sir, I'm ashamed for you! Madam, you sleep now."

It was bright daylight when she awakened, she could hear the waves washing against the shore. She wanted to leap into the sea and wash away the memory of last night. Instead, she buried her head in the pillow and wept.

"He's criminal, there's only one way to cope with him, *like*

a criminal," the lawyer said. "You *can* get a divorce. You get him to this house and we'll have the place wired. You think you can get him here?"

Mae sighed. "I've never found how to keep him away."

"How much do you need to turn the electricity back on? I'll take care of it." The lawyer wasn't afraid to advance a few dollars now. He'd discovered when it was taken for mending, that the small holy figure from Prague was worth a fortune. And it was his. Mae was giving it to him instead of a fee.

So the lights were turned on, the house was wired, a dictograph installed, and seven witnesses were secreted upstairs, including the lawyer, detectives, a court stenographer.

"You are going to have to play a damned convincing scene," the lawyer said. "This man is powerful and he's dangerous. If he thinks for one moment that you're trapping him..."

"I am an actress," she said softly.

"When you have enough, you give us this signal: *David, there is nothing more to say*. We'll come down then."

"I understand."

"Be careful you include everything, the financial situation, the indignities you've suffered, the seduction."

"That too?"

"You play your cards right, we'll get you back every cent this guy swindled from you. At least all he hasn't spent. Ready? Good. Phone him."

David was there in ten minutes. He rushed into the house, through the hall, into the living room and stopped short at sight of her. He was standing one foot away from a microphone hidden under a pillow!

He gave her riding breeches and soft silk shirt a swift appraisal. He did not like her in pants, but today he said, "I am glad to see you, even in the pants. What does it mean? I suppose I am not allowed to come near you?"

"David, I want to talk about a divorce and I want to talk quietly and reasonably like civilized people."

"You are my wife. You cannot leave me, you have nothing. I had to get everything you owned for that reason. In my coun-try the wife does not rule. Bubi, let me rule you."

He came toward her, arms outstretched.

"David, how can I feel desire? You've hit me, you've raped me."

"I show you how intensely I love." He began talking sensually about what a man should do to show his manhood. It made her blush. Upstairs this very instant, seven men were taking it all down.

"You hurt a woman to arouse her, she is cold, she must be..."

"David, I want a divorce. If you won't grant me one, I'll fight for it. I'll tell in the court that you've taken my money, denied me the barest comforts, tortured me."

He laughed. "It won't work, Bubi, I say you have all my friends as lovers, I get them to come to court and say so. I started whispers months ago already."

She could have hit him. But very calmly she said, "A whispering campaign, David?"

"Only I didn't whisper," he roared. "It's easy. You are so sexy on the screen. These men get up, they say you are sexy off the screen—you have no grounds for divorce."

"And we'd go on then, together?"

"You'll come back to me. You're not going to give up every cent you have. House is in my name. Oil well is in my name."

She was getting nervous. "Very well, *David. I guess there's nothing more to say.*"

She listened, he noticed that.

"What is it? I go see."

"No, nothing," she said quickly. "David, tell me, you married me in the first place for my..." Even now, Mae couldn't bring herself to say it.

"No, my darling, my God, no! We were agreed to marry money, Alex, Serge and I. We didn't look at a woman without

money. But from the moment I saw you, from that moment to this, I am all hot for you. I'll give you a dozen babies." He started toward her like a madman.

"*David, there is nothing more to say!*" she almost screamed. Where were they? Why didn't they come? Something must have gone wrong with the wiring system. Mae struggled as David seized her. "Right now on the floor!" he roared.

The seven men came running into the room. It had been the most difficult scene she'd ever played.

Now the divorce could proceed. The lawyer got an order restraining David, he could not touch her, he could not visit her. She warned the lawyer that under no consideration would she allow the transcript of the conversation to be used in court because of Koran. The grounds would have to be cruelty, abuse and degradation before friends without reason; but they could just get word to David's lawyer that they *had* the transcript, and read excerpts to him. She knew David's lawyer, when she'd had enough money, he had been hers too. Word came at once from Alex. If she'd go back to David, she could have half her fortune. If she would give up the boy and let Alex raise him, David would give her \$250,000. This wasn't to be dignified with an answer. Mae sold her bedroom furniture, the lovely gold-leaf bed, and put Koran in St. John's School, under the special care of Sister Aloysius.

David had visiting privileges. She only hoped she would never run into him. The first Saturday Koran was at the school Mae went to get him for the week end. She was actually early, it was such a fine day; she thought they might have a walk on the beach. Surprisingly, Koran was ready, dressed and waiting in the office.

"Why, you're ready!" she said and the sister at the desk looked up puzzled.

"You *said* you'd be here at noon, Miss Murray."

"I didn't call!"

"Someone called and said it was Koran's mother, you were coming for the child, would he be ready."

"Listen closely, sister, was it my voice? Listen to me speak."

The sister turned pale. "No, I don't believe it was."

"Koran will be allowed to go with no one but me." She took his hand and hurried out. They almost bumped into Nina Huberich.

"Don't ever try it, Nina. If the Mdivanis touch him, they'll be held on charges of criminal kidnapping."

But it made one thing clear. She must be free and she must have her son. She made a quick decision. "If I am willing to forfeit the money, if I ask nothing but Koran and freedom, *then* can I get my divorce?"

It went through quickly on those terms. And what more did she need? There was plenty of money in the world, she'd made millions. With her child as an incentive and her freedom, she could certainly do it again. She was the same person. Shocked, numb, but the same. She left Koran with the nuns and went to New York to make a new beginning.

17



The 1933-34 Broadway season opened gloomily, with the country still in the depths of the depression that had lasted five years. Leading theatrical producers had lost their money; the most dependable angels were bankrupt. Ziegfeld, never recovered from the stock-market crash, had died broke. Now in quick succession the theatre lost Otto Kahn; Charles Dillingham; Joseph Urban, who had created the magnificent scenic designs for Ziegfeld shows; humorist Ring Lardner, who'd written sketches and lyrics for Ziegfeld; comedian Charles Mack of the *Follies*, the *Vanities* and the *Scandals*; Sime Silverman, publisher of *Variety*; beautiful Lilyan Tashman, who'd made her debut in the *Follies*; "Fatty" Arbuckle, who'd never been able to salvage his movie career but had revived *Baby Mine* on Broadway. (Lew Cody died too, the actor who married Mabel Normand and gave her a measure of personal happiness after scandal had ruined her movie career.) Theatre properties were for the most part in the hands of mortgagor bankers who didn't know what to do with them; noted playwrights and actors had deserted to Hollywood.

Yet, within six weeks after the season opened, there was a wave of re-awakened interest that amounted to a rebirth. A new generation, brought up on movies, suddenly discovered the theatre; the older generation rediscovered it, Hollywood players who had started on Broadway came tripping back. Maxwell Anderson's *Mary of Scotland*, Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness*, Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White* and Sidney Howard's *Dodsworth* were immediate hits. Billie Burke gave the Shuberts the right to the title *Ziegfeld Follies* and Willie Howard and Fanny Brice (as "Baby Snooks") opened at the Winter Garden.

Among the top hits of that spring was a prizefight farce produced by Sidney Harmon and James Ullman at the Cort, *The Milky Way*, in which a shifty but dumb milk-wagon driver was catapulted to the middleweight boxing championship. Sidney Harmon persuaded Mae to step into the role of the prizefight manager's mistress, in a cast co-starring Hugh O'Connell as the milkman, Brian Donlevy as the real prizefighter, and Sam Levene as the manager.

At first the part alarmed Mae. "Well *she's* no gardenia," she said. But Harmon and Ullman insisted that was the whole point, off-beat casting, the surprise of seeing someone elegant in a part which the audience expected to be played by the brassier blonde type personified by Gladys George, who'd initiated the role. And it was a challenge to play her first straight part on the stage, master the prizefight jargon, be again in a hit show on Broadway. Mae took it.

The moment she stepped on the stage, there was welcoming applause. Brian, Sam and Hugh were talking in the scene, stage right, but applause drowned them out, and Mae ran to the footlights, forgetting the play. From out there in the dark came the lovely noise she'd craved from that day in Paris when nuns took the children to the circus and she'd heard for the first time, a mass of people clapping. Bowing, she felt almost herself again, the Mae Murray of old days at the New Amsterdam.

It was the first time for more than a year than she had felt anything. For a year, her divorce had moved through the courts, she had danced across the country in motion picture houses; but now she felt alive again, hungry for food, glad to go out dancing. She brought Koran in from the Brothers' School he was attending near New Rochelle to see a matinee. He'd never been to the theatre before and he sat, leaning on his elbows in the box, gazing down at her as if she were some creature from fairyland.

"Was that you?" he said when they were outside, on their way to dinner. "It didn't seem like you. I couldn't say to her, 'Mommy, I hit a home run Saturday.'"

"What kind of a woman did you think she was, Koran?"

"Nice," he said. "OK. There was kissing," he added.

"Not much. Not real kissing. You don't have to really kiss on stage, you save your lips for the lips of one person. You'll save yours for the girl you marry. That's why we kiss on the cheek, you and I."

He considered that briefly. "When do we see the yak? I like animals better than anything."

They were going to the zoo next day; she loved taking him to the Central Park zoo, watching his face. It reminded her of the girl in the *Follies* who'd had her picture taken with her eyes closed, asleep, the child's face not yet touched by reality. Was it possible ever to keep that innocent look? Olive Thomas had had such a face, and Marilyn Miller. Now Olive was gone and Marilyn, after the brilliant success of *As Thousands Cheer*, was out of a job—she and Chet O'Brien both. Chet had been stage manager and choreographer of the Irving Berlin-Moss Hart smash hit and he'd been fired one night for a practical joke. Marilyn, star of the show, left along with Chet and married him the same night. Now they couldn't get any jobs. Marilyn and Mae were friends again. They'd met one night at El Morocco and talked for the first time since Mae had passed along Ziegfeld's warning about Jack Pickford. Marilyn had found out for herself, her marriage to Jack hadn't lasted. She

was as beautiful as ever but the flowerlike face had known suffering; it had changed.

Koran's was the wonderful child's face; his golden hair shone, his eyes were loving, and Mae determined nothing should ever hurt him. She'd be his Hans Christian Andersen and write the story with a perfect ending. All she needed now was money, something big. But when the offer came, it meant going such a long way off, so far from the boy, that her first impulse was to say no.

She was offered three pictures in England, a year's work at one hundred thousand dollars. It was a sum that could assure their future; she explained it to Koran that way. It would mean a year apart, but then they could have a home and be together.

"We'll have a house and go swimming? I won't have to stay at school any more? OK," he said.

So she cabled London and booked passage on the *Queen Mary* to sail the following Saturday.

A few days before, she visited Koran at school. Bill O'Hare, one of the dancers from her tour, drove her out there. He was crazy about Koran, gave him his bike, and taught him how to ride. Bill promised to come out and visit "while your Mother's away."

"I'll be OK," Koran said, very grown-up.

But when she phoned on Saturday to say good-by, the boy was ill and couldn't come to the phone. He was in the infirmary, the brother-doctor had seen him yesterday; when the fever started climbing, they'd called in an outside doctor as she'd instructed in an emergency. The child was not dangerously ill, children ran fevers, she wasn't to worry.

Mae stared dully at the bellboys who had come for her trunks, and automatically checked the address: Queen Mary, stateroom 21, B deck, sailing at midnight. How high was the fever, she wondered? Maybe children ran fevers but Koran didn't; he'd never been ill. Her voice was trembling when she called Bill O'Hare. Koran was ill, could he drive her to see him?

Bill came at once. Bless him, he was a dancer; dancers didn't ask a bushel of questions or argue about time. It was seven, the ship sailed at midnight. Quietly, without conversation, they inched their way through the city streets, stopping, starting, sitting in endless tieups, until finally the road leaped ahead like a ribbon released from the spool and wound out through tar-nished towns.

Koran was a good strong boy. Perhaps by the time they arrived, the fever would be broken. Perhaps they'd fed him the wrong things, not knowing he was used to natural foods: nuts, fruits, vegetables. She spoke of that to Bill.

"It's been a long time since you had the boy at home with a nurse-dietician, little Murray," he said.

For a moment, she was furious at Bill. Koran was her baby, she saw him again as he had been in Switzerland when they danced to the record player and light shone on his blue-veined skin.

The dark countryside looked totally unfamiliar. When they finally made the last turn and swung into the school grounds, all was gray and asleep. They tried the doors of two buildings and found them locked. Then a door opened and there was a lighted bulb, and a brother sitting at a desk.

"Where is he?" she whispered.

"I beg your pardon, whom did you want?"

"We're looking for Koran Mdivani, he's in the infirmary," Bill said.

"I'm his mother, he's ill. Please, I implore you, hurry."

The brother led them across the campus, into a low building and down a corridor, into a room where a row of flat white cots floated in a sea of menthol. At the far end was a blue night light, Mae ran toward that, a brother sat beside Koran's bed. He was heavy, her baby, she gathered him up and the arms he put around her neck were heavy and hot, his head was burning.

"Koran!"

"I'm . . . sleepy . . . Mommy."

"How high is his fever?"

A brother brought the blue light and she could see the child, his lips and cheeks like dead roses.

"A high fever's usual with ear infections," the brother said, "by morning the abscess will start to drain."

"By morning I'll be on the high seas!"

Another brother appeared out of nowhere, Brother Paul, the doctor. He repeated what Brother Jonathon had said, urged her to be calm, not to worry, Koran would be fine in a few days. They would cable. The infirmary clock said ten. It was a good two-hour ride to the pier.

She laid the sick child back on his pillow; in sleep, he shivered with the heat. The brothers reassured her and Bill O'Hare guided her away from the wavering blue light. Halfway down the stairs, she stopped short.

"He's mine," she screamed, "mine!" and she bolted back up the stairs, burst into the room and started wildly wrapping Koran in his blankets.

The brothers tried to dissuade her. In the end, they helped her wrap and carry him. She sat in the car clutching her bundle while Bill turned and started for the city.

"We want the best hospital in New York," she told him, rocking back and forth, rocking and rocking. Her bundle gave off heat like a furnace, the whole car seemed permeated with the scent of menthol and starch. Sometimes Koran moaned, she held him and prayed, she kept praying until they arrived at the Presbyterian Hospital. Bill lifted Koran and they ran up the stairs into the gleaming lighted lobby.

"I have a very sick child," she told them at the desk. "He is burning with fever, an ear infection. He needs immediate care."

They wanted to know who her doctor was. They were sorry, but no arrangements had been made.

She and Bill ran down the steps with their bundle. They

drove to another hospital. No arrangements had been made there either. If it were an accident of course they could take him in Emergency.

"Find an ear, nose and throat hospital, they'll recognize this as an emergency," she said, putting her cool cheek against the hot one. The nightmare went on. They drove to another place. She wouldn't let Bill carry him, she staggered up the shallow steps with her bundle; this time she didn't stop at the desk, she ran down a corridor as fast as she could go, confronted a man in a white coat and thrust her bundle at him.

"This is a desperately sick child. We've come from out of town. Money is no object, get the best ear man in town!"

"You're in the dispensary."

"Let's not waste time. This is... it might be..." She didn't want to use the word but she *knew*, from some picture in which she'd been a nurse. "Mastoids!" she said.

She must have yelled it. White figures came flying. Koran was put down to rest, covered in a white heap, wheeled away. Where? She ran down the hall, opened wrong doors, burst into a room and she could smell him, the thin hot scent of his fever.

"You're his mother?" a nurse said. "This is the examining room. You rest outside, we'll let you know."

A man in white took her arm. "The doctor's on his way. We're lucky, he was in town, he's the best."

"How about money?" someone said. "A deposit is needed."

Her checkbook was back in the hotel room. Leaving Bill to look after Koran, she rushed out to a cab. Suddenly, all her pent-up emotions gave way and she burst into tears.

"You in trouble, lady?" the driver said, studying her through the rear vision mirror. They always knew her. "Ain't you Mae Murray, the Merry Widow?"

"Yes," she sobbed. "It's my little boy."

"Chrisalmighty, didn't know you had one. Still live at One West 67th, Miss Murray?"

"No. Wait, right here, please."

She dashed into the St. Moritz, the assistant manager cashed her check. Wasn't she sailing on the *Mary*? he asked. Her eyes flew to the clock. A minute past midnight. The ship was gone. And what did it matter now. Back through the lobby she rushed.

"Hey, Mae Murray, we want an autograph, give us a break!" Several people surrounded her, tried to stop her.

"Quickly," she told the driver.

"You don't have to tell me. Them hospitals want their money on the dotted line. Deposit foist and when it's time to cart 'em home, hot or cold, they stand in the corridor 'til you dig up the dough. Got a kid myself."

She ran down the hospital corridor with the bills clutched in her hand. Money spoke. It opened doors. Thank heavens, she'd had *The Milky Way*.

Bill was waiting with the specialist, a sandy-haired man, she couldn't see his eyes for the glare of his glasses, very tall, very Scotch with a slight burr to his speech.

"You were right, Mother. A few more hours, this child would have been past saving. Mastoiditis, there's pressure on the brain. We'll operate in a few hours."

"He must have the best." She looked at the doctor imploringly. Was he right? kind? could he save the child?

"It's a critical situation," he said. "Sometimes one operation doesn't suffice."

One operation didn't suffice. Neither did three. Life narrowed down to the walls of the ugly brown corridor and the small gray room where Koran lay. He looked at her wonderingly, as if pleading with her to help him. Sometimes she could read to him, sometimes he listened while she talked of the zoo where they'd go when he was well, of Central Park and the squirrels. Sometimes he'd drowse away and she'd be left alone, hearing the faraway sounds of the world outside, an elevated train grinding around a curve, the clang of traffic.

Work was out of the question. When she went once to a booking agent, to see what he could get her, she wore her

black suit with a pink rose at her throat, a snug black hat, and tried to be Mae Murray of the lilting step and the insouciant air, but she crumpled when he said, "How's things?"

"My little boy," she sobbed.

"Murray, it's a damned shame, what's happened to you? Get some rest, dear, see me then."

And her money was going, for day and night nurses, for doctor bills, consultations, anesthetics. They were using a spinal next. The child couldn't take any more ether. Mae didn't have the money for this next operation. She told no one. Koran must have the best. In the paper, she read that David was in town at the Ritz Towers. He was the last person she wanted to ask, but Koran must have this operation.

"You put a restraining order on love. I put a restraining order on my pocketbook," David said, when she phoned him. Everything was fast and furious with David, one sentence and he slammed the receiver down. Mae gave him five minutes to think it over and phoned again. After all, the child was his flesh and blood. David didn't answer. There was nothing to do but run all the way to the Ritz Towers. She sat in the lobby waiting for him to come down. She phoned a dozen times. There was a party in his apartment, each time someone else answered; when she asked for David, they hung up. Why should he hate her so? What had she ever done to him—except make possible this stay at a luxury hotel.

Dimly, something the psychiatrist had said came back to Mae. She'd never known David, he said, she'd judged him by her own standards. Had she ever known anyone? Bob? She thought of him suddenly with his smooth red-gold hair and placid face and wished with all her heart that she had known him, that nothing had ever happened to pull them apart, that she'd never met this Mdivani who had shattered her life and was now shattering Koran's.

"Miss Murray."

A thick-set man with sad gray eyes was peering down at her.

"I'm the house detective," he said softly. "Prince Mdivani has asked that you be removed from the lobby. Let me find you a cab."

"No, thank you, I'll walk."

"I'm a fan of yours," the detective said in the same quiet way. "Me and my wife saw *Peacock Alley* three times."

She ran out blindly into the street, into any street. She walked a long while. On 59th, a man grasped her arm, startling her.

"Mae Murray, you remember me? You were going to do my play, my brother worked with you out at MGM. What in the world are you doing alone on the street at three o'clock?"

After a lifetime of taking nothing, asking nothing, she found herself begging this veritable stranger for five hundred dollars. She walked into the hospital that morning with the money in her hand. In the corridor she backed against the wall to let them wheel by a cart, someone coming from the operating room with a pale gray face and a nurse alongside holding the blood plasma. It was some poor half-dead child with purple blotches beneath its eyes and a head turbaned in bandages. They had turned the corner before Mae realized it was *her* child, and went chasing after him. At the door to his room, a nurse stopped her.

"No one must go in just now. Postoperative rest."

"I am his mother," she whispered.

"Perhaps later." The nurse felt it hopeless, it was in her face.

Mae retreated obediently; but when the interne wheeled out the cart, the nurse and doctor came out, talking; and the moment they passed, Mae slipped slyly along the wall and into the room. The inert bundle was breathing with a small rise and gasp of air.

"Koran you will live," she whispered. "I give you my strength, every drop of it." She leaned across the bed and grasped the limp hands. "You'll grow up to be a man and forget this ever happened. We'll travel all over the world. God

gives us the power to accomplish all good, if we believe. And we believe, you and I. You will open your eyes again and be Koran."

Through the night, nurses checked respiration and temperature, doctors checked the dressing, Mae kept his hands in hers and willed him to live.

In the morning Koran was better. Two weeks later he left the hospital, frail and with a different look. He had suffered, poor child. Now he must have sun and air and be wooed back to his old self. Every day the nurse prepared excellent food, each day Mae had the doorman carry him through snowdrifts to a taxi and she rode with him through the park. When they walked across the lobby, he lagged behind, apathetic, begging her not to walk so fast.

The doctor said this was normal, a long hospital siege left a child with depleted energy. What the boy needed was to get out of town, into the country, all he was breathing here was exhaust fumes. The doctor lived in the country himself, went home every week end to the family home near Rensselaer. Children there were hardier than city children. "You'll have to make some arrangements for the boy if he's going to be ready to go back to school in the fall."

Mae scoured the market for fresh fruit and crisp vegetables. She read books on nutrition. Her chinchilla coat brought in enough to take care of rent, food and the nurse; but Koran must get to the country and she must get back to work.

"Doctor," she said finally, "you say Koran needs country air, he must also be somewhere within your care. Would it be possible, would your sisters allow the child . . . I'd make it well worth their while, money's no object."

The doctor considered it.

"I must return to work and it would be a true benefaction to know my little boy is in good hands."

Next week end Mae and Koran went to Rensselaer. The doctor had talked it over with his sisters and they'd agreed—Nan,

the one who stayed at home, and Laura, the dental assistant. They had been in mourning since their mother's death a year before, they were delighted at the prospect of having a child in the house. They were devoutly Catholic and there was a good parochial school nearby. Even Koran showed animation. Were there cows in the country? Could he have a dog? Did they have cats? He chatted briskly on the train. At Albany, they got off and took a cab. It was cold, but the snow had thawed and the roads were clear. March wind whipped the smoke from every chimney into a twirling scarf. How much farther, Koran kept asking and would it be a white house or a brown?

It turned out to be a white house, large and substantial, with a red brick fireplace and a porch and plenty of room for a boy to play. It looked homey, inviting, the front door swung open at once and a hearty voice said, "Come in out of the cold, child. I'm Nan." But as he slipped inside, the woman put herself squarely in the doorway as if she'd bar it, and scrutinized Mae from head to toe.

"Well, you certainly like perfume," she said and then, still eyeing her sharply, she backed off, and Mae was admitted into the spare prim parlor.

The doctor stood before the fire talking with Koran, Laura came from the kitchen and shook hands. They all sat down tentatively, reaching for conversation. Laura wanted to see Koran's teeth. She was very pleased, they were beautiful teeth. Nan touched the head bandage and the doctor explained how it was to be dressed.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am, having this child in safe hands, knowing he'll have good food and fond care."

Nan looked at her coldly. "The poor child needs care, you can see that." And again the cold scrutiny from head to toe.

She was about thirty-five, a wiry spinster, in mourning black for the mother who'd been dead a year. Laura wore black too; but Laura dressed like a businesswoman, while Nan

resembled some Brontë heroine, a fugitive from the heath, with blazing amber eyes and a wide passionate face. She wore no make-up, her hair was her pride, maple-colored hair, very thick and glossy, which she wore parted in the center, scalloped across the forehead and pulled back into a chignon.

"I've never approved of movies, so I can't pretend to have seen your pictures," she told Mae, while Laura raised her pale eyebrows as if to indicate that she had seen them but had better not say so.

"I have only one concern," Mae said. "That you watch over Koran, that he breathe this good country air."

"He'll breathe the air, all right," the doctor said.

It was a dull, endless evening. They ate dinner, sat by the fire, listened to the radio. Very early, Mae excused herself and retired with Koran to their rooms. Everything was spotlessly clean, scrubbed, starched, no worry about that. And they liked Koran, no worry about that either. In the two days and nights of her visit, Mae saw him relax and accept a place in the household. He went to the piano without being asked. He was learning a hymn for Laura. He romped in the yard with the dog. He helped Nan clear the table, and had started calling her "Aunt Nan."

But they did not like Mae, that was clear too. Nan studied her every move sharply, sniffed her perfume, and disapproved of her sheer silk hose. Laura wasn't so antagonistic but she could think of nothing to talk about and kept pulling at her hair and her skirt self-consciously. The doctor had no small talk. Koran kissed her good-by and hugged her tight but he went chasing after the dog just as her taxi pulled up and when the front door closed, it closed tight.

The trip back to New York was long and lonely. Mae missed Koran already and longed to surprise him by sending a sled from Albany but she didn't have the money. She bought a paper and read a denouncement by Hearst of Roosevelt's Social Security Act, she read the latest on Wally Simpson and King Edward and then, on page two—the death of Marilyn Miller!

Stunned, Mae sat staring at the print. Marilyn was so essentially *life*, the story made no sense. She had been operated on for a minor sinus infection, and died at the age of thirty-eight. That made no sense either. In Grand Central Station Mae bought a great bunch of pansies and took them to St. Bartholomew's Church to put them in Marilyn's pale hands. What was happening to the gay, beautiful people?

18



A strange thing now happened to Mae, the first period of inactivity in her life. The strength she had poured out for Koran left her drained and apathetic. Often she found herself sleeping in a chair with her clothes on after nights of lying sleepless in bed. For weeks she had no voice, only a whisper. With the voice went the self-confidence. She didn't recognize this sad soundless creature, and she wouldn't let anyone else see her. Mae Murray was synonymous with vivacity, vitality, and inner glow!

There was no point in making the rounds of the booking agents, and every trinket went to raise a few dollars. All that was left of her wardrobe were two suits and a gauzy gown or two to wear when she might be called to judge a dance contest. There were dance contests going on to swing music and sweet music; she thought perhaps she might be asked to judge.

Time passing meant nothing. The world had changed. Justine Johnstone came to town with her husband, producer Walter Wanger, but Mae didn't even phone Justine. She didn't want pity. What would they talk about, anyhow, the Academy

Award for *The Great Ziegfeld*? It was no wonder movie theatres were operating on a double-feature basis. *The Great Ziegfeld* was one of the "super-colossal" pictures of the year and the ads tried to make something of Bob Leonard's direction and Luise Rainer's performance; but to someone who'd been part of Ziegfeld's world, William Powell was not Ziegfeld, Luise Rainer was not Anna Held, Myrna Loy was hardly Billie Burke, and the aura of magic was missing.

The only person Mae was willing to see was Bill O'Hare. When he was in town, he drove her to Rensselaer to see Koran. These visits were the highlights. Koran was gaining weight, color was coming back into his face, he could play again, he was in school, he needed larger shoes and longer pants. The golden curls had been clipped short and the boy was growing tall. Mae felt whole again when he dashed out to meet her; yet she hated to go to Rensselaer, dreaded it, postponed it because she owed these people a mounting debt and Nan's amber eyes pierced through and through and never let go. Nan knew a thing or two. Big-time movie star, indeed!

Finally, when it was least expected, a break came. Mae could go out to see the boy with her head held high. A new contract was awaiting her in Hollywood, Radiant Pictures, this concern was called; members of the board had phoned her a half dozen times and they'd sent a thousand dollars to pay her expenses to the coast. Stahl's and Sherman's experience hadn't deterred them in the least. They were releasing independently, not through RKO like Lowell Sherman, not through MGM like Stahl. They wanted her to come at once and they assured her that radio interviews and personal appearances would be forthcoming in Los Angeles even before the first picture got under way.

Mae could go out to the doctor's now with her courage high. Let Nan sharpen her eyes on that. And she would take Koran away with her.

"I want to take Koran with me," she said, after she'd told them the news.

"What would the child do in *Hollywood*?" Nan said in a shocked tone.

"And take him out of school?" Laura fluttered her hands like ZaZu Pitts.

"It's not a sound idea, Miss Murray. He's made good progress, but I can't give him a clean bill of health just yet. Let's play it safe," the doctor said.

Koran looked from one to the other and dropped his eyes. He didn't *beg* to go, she was glad of that, he was a well-mannered boy. For herself she was disappointed, but she had to let the doctor guide her, he had brought Koran back to health. She was deeply grateful for all they'd done and told them so.

"Don't thank us, this is the boy's home," Nan said severely, wiping her pale mouth with her napkin. She didn't approve of lipstick, perfume, or smiling. It wasn't any wonder the woman had never been married, Mae thought.

"This new picture commitment will allow me to repay you and amply, for all you've done," she said. Twenty-five thousand, fifty thousand, she wanted them to have something big for watching over her child. Certainly the doctor knew, she'd been lavish with money when Koran was ill, she'd be lavish again, she was on her way to Hollywood, her town in a different way than New York, but her town.

The men who were financing Radiant Pictures took her to lunch at the Brown Derby and dinner at the Beverly Hills Hotel. There were orchids on the table, Fred Astaire came over to say hello, Jack Barrymore stopped by, Garbo sent a note, Shirley Temple asked for her autograph. It was all the same as ever.

Not quite the same, the money men said. Business was off in the industry, it had been ruined by double features, by the Roosevelt Administration, by Screeno and Bank Nights and giveaways and "B" pictures. Each man had his own ideas about *why*.

"Stars don't generate the same enthusiasm," said a heavy-set

man, very big in the citrus industry. "Garbo is the only one with real glamour. You've always had it, you and Gloria Swanson, and Fairbanks and Valentino. The public fell in love with you. They don't fall in love that way today, the stars are more numerous and less dazzling. The only newcomer I'd bet on is Crawford."

"I wouldn't even bet on Hedy. There isn't as much sex in *Ecstasy* as there was in *The Gilded Lily*," another said.

Their terms were good, a three-picture deal. As soon as possible, they wanted Mae to sit down with the men in charge of production and get a picture rolling. She needn't worry about production, they could assure her the same sort of show-stoppers she'd done when it was her own company. To make a dent in today's market, a picture had to be *big* like *The Good Earth*, *A Star is Born*.

All the trade papers carried stories of the negotiations: MAE MURRAY SIGNS WITH RADIANT. She wrote letters to Koran, enclosing clippings. As soon as school was out, perhaps he'd be able to join her. She'd been down to the beach and walked out on the pier at Malibu. Would he like to go fishing?

A week passed after the last luncheon meeting and nothing happened. Two weeks. When Mae phoned the man who had made such a fortune in citrus, he wasn't in, nor did he return the call. One by one, she phoned each of them. No one returned her call. It was the same old story. The deal was off but no one had the courage to tell her.

One day, leaving NBC after a broadcast, Mae bumped into George Fitzmaurice. He was as dapper as ever, but something had changed in the maestro, there was less fire. He took both her hands and shook them warmly.

"My little star. I am glad to see you, I'm sorry for what has happened."

"What has happened?"

He saw the expression on her face and flicked his moustache with his finger. "You mean no one has told you? That you cannot work, that the deal has been blocked."

"It's like a Punch and Judy show, George. One moment they hug you and kiss you, the next moment you get banged over the head. I had lunch with them, the deal was all set. Now they won't even speak to me on the phone!"

"You are what you might call black-balled. Because you walked out that time in the middle of a contract."

She wrote to Mr. Mayer. "Apparently I cannot earn a living because of the power you have over other producers. I am putting all pride aside, Mr. Mayer, I beg of you, do not continue this persecution. If I have wronged you, forgive me. I have a child to support, I need work and I can have work—if you'll allow me. Search your heart for some core of religious feeling. Think back, your parents must have taught you, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'"

She took it to the office and gave it to Ida Coverman.

"I told you, he won't see you, it's no use, Miss Murray."

"He needn't see me. Just please have him read my letter."

Mrs. Coverman shook her head.

She picked up the letter and wandered through the studio, down the street she and Gilbert had traversed that awful day, when she was wrapped in a dirty blanket. Poor Jack, they had killed him virtually, getting him to sign that fabulous contract, then trying to buy it back when they didn't like the sound of his voice. There was nothing wrong with his voice that couldn't have been corrected. His voice was high in his first talkie, but he'd had an inexperienced director and he himself was in an emotional crisis. Jack had been frightened of talking as he'd been frightened of dancing; he needed reassurance. When he'd driven up to the studio gate one day the gateman had informed him he was no longer to park his car on the lot. That was his reassurance. They had to pay him the huge salary stipulated but they humiliated him. You had to fight for your place.

She wrote letters to Schenck and Rubin, to the head of every studio in town. She took the letters to each studio herself. For almost a year, she lived quietly, made the rounds of the studios, wrote more letters, tried again. To Koran she wrote cheerfully

about the radio work she was doing. She had to try, for his sake, to find a way to reach Mr. Mayer. There must be a human streak in him, he had children too. If he only knew that she had left the studio pregnant, had gone away to have her child, that this child was all she had left and she must have work to support him. Mr. Mayer was a sentimental man, he should be told of Koran's illness, how David had hung up the phone when she asked for some of her own money to save their son. No effort could get her to Mr. Mayer. No one else could lift the ban against her. An iron curtain had closed off all possibility of work in her profession.

It was August when she returned to New York to accept work at radio station WMAC. Bill O'Hare drove her out to see Koran. Bill had been dancing all season in *Babes in Arms*, and he was glad of a chance to get into the country; he shared her excitement about the new radio program. It would be very confining, a fifteen-minute spot three times a day and she'd write a good deal of it herself, but what a chance to reach out to people.

"Tell them about dancing," Bill said. "What it means to you, how it lifts you. Once you get started, letters will pour in."

They talked all the way. She began feeling the lift as they neared Albany. Koran didn't know she was coming, he'd be surprised. But they were the surprised ones. No one was at home.

"The races are on at Saratoga. Let's drive up and see if they're there. Nan and Laura strike me as ladies who like the horses."

Bill always made her laugh. "You're the one who strikes me. They've been instructed not to take him to too-public places." Because of David, because you never knew with David, she had warned them.

Bill shook his head. "You've been gone a while, how much attention do you think they pay to those instructions?"

He was right. They had barely stepped out onto the clubhouse verandah when she heard a piercing "Mommy!" over

the noise of the thronged track; and Koran came hurtling down the aisle.

"Don't run," shrilled Nan.

He ran into Mae's arms, so excited he was shaking.

"You're back, you're going to stay? When did you come? Did you make lots of money?"

"I'm working on radio, WMAC, starting day after tomorrow. I'll be on every day and you'll have to come up and spend some week ends with me. Would you like that?"

She must not be subservient to Nan and Laura; Koran must not see. She shook hands cordially with the doctor and his sisters; in a burst of shame it occurred to her she was wearing the same suit, the same hat as when she'd first brought Koran to their house.

"You shouldn't come like this," Nan said. "No one here knows he's your son, why make a scene?"

"We've been reading the papers, looking for news about your picture," Laura said.

"It wasn't the right thing. In this radio program I feel I have something worth while."

To the doctor, when she had him alone, she explained that she'd had some drastic disappointments. "You know that I've earned vast sums and if you'll bear with me a little longer . . . It would help if you believed in me."

"Oh, I guess it'll come out all right," he said, not very cordially. She felt like a stranger, a meal ticket that wasn't paying off.

It was better when Koran came to her. He did come occasionally, in summer he came for a whole month, and she took an apartment overlooking the park. They rode on the Staten Island Ferry, went to the zoo, the Met, the Museum of Natural History. There were concerts on Sunday afternoons, they rode on bus tops, and ate ice cream at Rumpelmeyers. They went to a matinee of Disney's *Snow White*. For some reason Koran was hesitant. As they approached the theatre, he kept hanging back, staring in windows.

"Koran, don't you want to see *Snow White*?"

"Aunt Nan says the theatre is wicked!"

"The theatre has been my life, Koran, almost like church. You know people come to the altar rails with love and devotion, well they come to the theatre that way too."

She took his hand and led him into the dark theatre; Koran emerged in a state of jubilee. He could barely wait to go to see *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Then she found *Ferdinand the Bull* playing in Forest Hills and they went all the way out to catch that.

"The love of God is our highest love, Koran, but it doesn't rule out beauty or adventure or art. The love of God *includes* all this."

Mae never knew what she'd have to cope with next. Koran wanted to know about his father. Nan had told him David was very cruel, that if he ever got him, he'd beat him. Mae had to explain that Nan knew nothing about his father. Someday perhaps he would know his father and judge for himself.

The last night, they stayed up late, sipping lemon squash and watching the traffic below hiss through the damp streets. It had been raining, humid air drifted up to them heavy with the scent of withered leaves. Tomorrow Koran would be going "home" with the doctor. She reminded him again that this would not be forever. Someday they would have a home together, they must both pray very earnestly every night. He climbed into bed and she was bending over him, tucking in the sheet when he thrust up his face and gave her a man's kiss, hard, on the mouth.

"Koran! What in the world? I've told you, this is what we save for the one we marry."

He gave her a funny look. "Aunt Nan says that's silly. She always kisses me. Saturday mornings we roll around on the bed and have a lot of fun tickling. You know what she says? She says you'd kiss me if you loved me. Don't you love me, Mommy?"

"You know I do! But you must keep that kiss for the girl you'll love some day. Don't *let* Nan, she mustn't."

Oh dear Lord, the woman was evil, arousing the wrong

emotions in this child. Mae clasped his hands as she had when he was ill, she looked into the blue eyes, her own eyes.

"Aunt Nan says *she* is really my mother. And it is fun."

"Koran, you know who your mother is. Now go to sleep, dear, I'll sit beside you as I did when you were little."

Perhaps she was judging too harshly, perhaps the woman was only stupid. But the memory of the sharp amber eyes, the penetrating look, none of them married in the family—how could you be sure? Mae held his hand until the fingers grew limp in hers. And stupid or evil, this was the wrong life for Koran, a life without culture. He must grow up to be a splendid man, clean and healthy, not spoiled by some sick, frustrated old maid.

She visited a lawyer and explained her dilemma. How could she get her child away from these people when she hadn't enough money to support him?

The lawyer said she should take the boy to California and sue Mdivani for child support. "Don't let this criminal get away with it," he said. He had looked up newspaper reports of the case; he hadn't believed her when she'd said she'd given David everything just to get free. The newspaper comment was: "Their divorce waived monetary interest and allowed her princely husband to enjoy the financial fruits of their union."

"He couldn't win," the lawyer said. "He has to support the boy. Go back to the lawyer who handled your divorce."

Again she tried to take Koran with her and again the doctor said *no* and she couldn't buck him until she had money to buck *with*. In California, David's lawyer tried to negotiate a settlement: two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for her if the boy was given into the father's custody, or, a similar amount in return for her romantic favors. Absurd suggestions.

Months were wasted before the suit opened with a burst of publicity in the newspapers, to a packed house in Judge Dockweiler's court. David sobbed loudly in court, begged to be given the child, and insisted that Mae Murray was bringing

suit only for the publicity involved. Judge Dockweiler obviously disliked the case. However, without the child in California within the court's jurisdiction, nothing could be settled; the child must appear in court. Case dismissed. When Mae spoke to Koran by phone, he answered in monosyllables. Nan was probably right beside him, dictating.

The race was on again, back across the continent, to Albany, a taxi to the doctor's house. It would be all right now, the attorney felt very sure once she had the child in California, the case could be settled, she need never be separated from Koran again. He would be safe. She bid the cab driver wait, ran up the steps, knocked at the door. Five-thirty. Certainly the sisters would be at home. There was a shuffling of feet. The door opened a crack and Nan screamed, "Get out!"

"I've come for Koran. He must go with me to California."

"We read all about it in the papers. You'll not drag him into this." The door slammed. Mae hadn't even seen him, her child was in that house and it was locked against her!

"Find me a state trooper," she told the cab man. "Drive toward Albany until we find one."

"Some people are holding my child," she told the state trooper. "A white house down the road three or four miles. Charge them with kidnapping!"

He was a well-built policeman, very military, handsome as an actor dressed for the part. They'd learned to be careful about dressing bit players as policemen. One who'd held back the crowd in *The Big Sister* later held up a store in the same uniform.

The trooper pounded on the door of the white house. "Open up for the police."

The door swung open and Nan stood there, her eyes blazing, Koran behind her.

"You Hollywood slut! You leave this boy where he belongs. He's not going with you now or ever." Nan lunged at Mae, clawing her hair and they both fell. Then the trooper held Nan and the cab driver helped Mae to her feet.

"You'll have to kill me, go ahead, use your gun, it's the only way you'll get this boy," Nan screamed. "He's been here for three years. Abandoned, you hear me? We've fed and kept him and the only way you'll get him is to kill me." She flung the door shut. It was terribly quiet. Koran would be terrified.

"I'd advise you to go into Albany and find yourself a lawyer," the state trooper said. "I can't fight that woman, I've no warrant. I don't even know who's telling what's true."

"I am Mae Murray."

"I know you are, ma'am, but I never did know you had a kid."

It was like the nightmare when Koran had burned with fever and no hospital would take them. The trooper led her firmly away. In the taxi she sat blindly touching her poor head where the hair had been yanked. It didn't belong to her, this head. Absently, she fumbled with her hat, getting it back in shape. The country turned away like a flying wheel, houses swam past, the streets of Albany moved in on them.

"Well this was a wild goose chase," the driver said, pulling up before a hotel. "You all right, lady?"

Two days later on the stand in Judge Francis Bergen's court she sat facing the doctor's lawyer. He was a bald-headed man with a sullen jaw who threw questions as if they were rocks. The pack of faces behind him were featureless. Questions about her marriage, why the boy didn't know his father, how much money she'd paid the doctor—no, not the thousands she'd paid for medical care, but during the years the boy had lived in the doctor's house, how much had she paid? What arrangements had she even *made* for payment? How often had she come to see the boy? Was it true she'd been in California almost a whole year? That at Christmas she had slept each day 'til noon at the doctor's house? That even now she was suing the boy's father in a notorious case?

To each question she tried to explain, *why* she had been in California, *why* she had not paid, why she was suing the father—for child *support*.

"Yes or no," demanded the lawyer. "Yes or no, Miss Murray."

He actually changed into Von Stroheim leering at her through his monacle. "And who iss directing zis picture? And who do you sink you are?"

Her head shook, cleared itself.

"My child is my only thought. I've struggled and fought for him, to earn a living, to keep him well." What could she say? She opened her little hands, they were empty.

"A very fine actress," sneered the lawyer. "You're not noted in vain as an *accomplished actress*. Now on the matter of kissing, Miss Murray. We are given to understand you don't kiss the boy?"

"Not on the lips. No. That is something he must save for the woman he'll love."

"So you don't want him kissed. Hm. You wouldn't mind if he got a little nudge would you?"

Outrageous. She turned quickly to the judge, and he was laughing!

Her lawyer helped her down from the stand.

"We're in trouble," he said, frightened. He couldn't stand up to the doctor's skilled lawyer and his skilled associate. She ran from him, out of the building down the steps, a group of women huddled about her, their faces tear-stained.

"Get away from here," they whispered.

"Don't you know this is a thug's court?"

"You won't get justice from Bergen."

"He's the one let off Dutch Schultz."

"It's a court of law," she said softly.

"Don't you believe it, honey. This is a harbor for crooks."

She escaped. They meant well but she mustn't listen. She tried to talk with Judge Bergen. He wouldn't see her. She tried to phone Koran. They wouldn't let him talk.

The trial went on. But what was she being tried *for*? God knew, she had had only one idea from the moment Koran was put in her arms a little blue flannel bundle, and that was to see

his life guided into the right channels. He was to have a fine education, good moral principles, music and art.

"Maybe in her mind!" shrilled Nan from the stand. "But in fact, nothing. All the care this boy's had we've given him."

The doctor took the stand. He had an excellent reputation, of course, he was a skilled surgeon. Laura took the stand, twisting her nervous hands. They said on oath that she had tried to snatch Koran. They brought in friends and neighbors to prove it. They brought forward parish priests to say how good they'd been to the boy. And who said they had not? Of course they'd cared for Koran, hadn't she thanked them? But they were lonely and sick too; and he was her son, born of the one passion she'd ever known and paid for dearly. She searched the courtroom for him, for the sight of his face. Finally, he was brought to the stand, handsome and manly in his blue suit, a tall boy for twelve. The sight of him swelled her heart with love, she tried frantically to catch his eye.

"Now Koran," the doctor's lawyer said. "We want you to answer a few questions. Can you speak up, a little louder, good. Tell this court, Koran, with whom do you wish to live?"

"With Aunt Nan," he said looking neither right nor left.

"Miss Mae Murray is your mother?"

"Yes." But he wouldn't look.

"You love her, Koran?"

"No."

There was a loud murmur in the courtroom. The judge rapped, calling for order. The child had been threatened, of course. It never occurred to Mae that a child could change, that he adjusts to his environment. She loved him and he must love her.

Her lawyer said, "Koran, you spent a month with your mother last summer. You talked then, as you've talked together many times, of the future, of the home you would have together. You professed yourself eager and happy at the prospect. You even prayed for it. What has changed you?"

"I like where I am," he chanted in a monotone.

"Over the years you've written to your mother, telling her of your love. She has a purse full of those letters right now." He read one. "'Beautiful Mommy, come and see me soon. I had a good report card. I love you truly. Koran.'"

"I... did that to fool her."

Like one bewitched he recited it. Mae stared at him, bewildered, unable to believe her ears. The moment court recessed, she went to her son in the corridor.

"Koran, how can you go to confession ever again and accept communion after what you have said?"

"I'm all right," he said stony-faced. "I had communion before I came to court. And I'm not to talk to you, Mommy. Aunt Nan says so."

The trial went on. Her lawyer deserted her because she had no money. She sat alone now, mute, listening to the weird plot, teachers of Koran, people she'd never seen.

"Why is this case still going on?" yelled a new voice. "It's been proven this woman can't support the child. His father wants the boy and he can afford him."

David's lawyer came forward, David's lawyer all the way from California. What right did he even have in a New York court? Oh it was clear now. David had paid for this tragic comedy of a case, it was all bought and paid for.

The typewritten verdict awarded Koran to the doctor's family. Bergen would not see Mae. Governor Lehman would not see her. She sat on his steps all night.

Surprisingly, in the weeks that followed, there was one man who would see her. The moment Judge Dockweiler read the verdict, he re-opened the case in California. David had gone too far in Albany. The case was so fraudulent that Dockweiler immediately knew the score. "This decision," he said, "could not have been handed down in any other court in America." He awarded Mae Murray four hundred dollars a month child support. David must take care of the child. And the boy was hers. There were screams and applause in the courtroom, women cried, and shouted good wishes. As soon as Mae would

notify the court she had established custody, the money would be forthcoming.

Koran was in New York. He had recently undergone an appendectomy, but he had recovered, and was ready to go home; and his mother went to get him.

The hospital corridor smelled of lunch trays, of disinfectant and stale flowers, all as it had been when she was fighting for his life, when she'd rushed down the corridor praying for her son's life.

"Koran!" she cried, opening the door, opening her arms to him.

He took a faltering step and backed away.

"Koran, it's all right, I wrote you, it's settled."

"I'm not supposed to talk to you," and he turned his eyes away from her. "Aunt Nan says Judge Bergen hasn't released me, she says. . . ."

"Go ahead, *tell* her what Nan says!" The woman was beside him like a witch. "Nan says you're to spit in her eye and you do as Nan says."

The boy did! Her own son, her perfect little child, did as the witch said.

That's all Mae remembered for a long time.

She was sitting on a bench in Central Park watching dark sift into the trees. It was summer again. Somehow she had survived. Beside her was a hat box and in it, cold cream, silk stockings, a change of lingerie. She had left the hotel as if she might be going to the rehearsal hall with her small round box. She felt she couldn't stay another night without paying the bill. The management had been very kind, they'd never dunned her, but she must owe thousands; and she couldn't take more from Bill O'Hare either.

At the drinking fountain she swallowed some clear water, then went back to her bench. She couldn't remember when she had last eaten, but she wasn't hungry. It was growing dark,

the horses of the carousel grew big and fuzzy. Night spread through the park.

She had loved David and she had loved Koran, both of them with all her heart; but something had gone wrong. She lived in one world, they lived in another. She had told the lawyer yesterday that David could have the boy, she was giving Koran to his father. It was time to let go.

It was time to listen. She needed fresh air, a pause in which to listen and find her beat. Trying to force life was wrong, and trying to force love. She had fought for Koran's life, fought to regain her place in pictures and it couldn't be done. She had to stop fighting and find herself again—where or how she didn't yet know. She thought about it through the night. Not frightened. Why be frightened? Rudy Valentino had slept on a bench in Central Park when he'd first come to New York and had no money. They had often walked through the park at night, when all their dreams were still ahead, long before they'd dreamed of being movie stars. Thinking of Rudy helped pass the long hours. Great star that he'd been, he'd failed as a man seeking happiness, and she'd failed as a woman.

Light trembled over the treetops. The myriad noises of the city started. A Western Union messenger rode by on his bike, whistling. She only half heard the tune. After a while he whizzed by again, whistling louder—the Merry Widow Waltz! He looked back and waved. He knew her. He was telling her what the public had always told her, that she was theirs, they hadn't forgotten. They still loved her!

What in the world am I doing here? she thought, waking as from deep sleep. God answers your need and her need was to dance. Movies were not the only thing. She would organize a company as she had before, tour America, Australia and Europe on the night-club circuit, and in theatres.

It was *Mae Murray* who straightened her skirt, picked up her hatbox and moved lightly through the park. Carriage

drivers nodded and smiled; they were watching her quick, pert feet, they'd know she was a dancer. She would open at the Mocambo, the Florida, or the Waldorf, in her glittering Merry Widow gown and headdress of paradise plumes. She'd have twelve boys behind her, and dance all the old favorites. She must learn the latest dance steps too. The sun cast a brilliant shaft of light between the towers of Fifth Avenue. It was like a spotlight and she hurried, almost ran, toward it. She was back on her radiant path again, on her way to the world where she belonged.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Ardmore, well known for her biographies of Hollywood celebrities, says her writing career really began in grammar school days in Chicago—with an imaginative piece on how the weatherman makes weather. At the University of Chicago and after graduation, she followed up her early interest with newspaper work, advertising copywriting, and a by-lined column in *Billboard*, international theatrical magazine.

Since that time, Mrs. Ardmore has been a busy contributor of celebrity biographies to such magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Good Housekeeping*, *McCall's*, *Coronet*, *Readers Digest*, *Parents' Magazine*, and *Photoplay*. And she has to her credit two recent best sellers: *Take My Life*, co-authored with Eddie Cantor; and *The Dress Doctor*, another Literary Guild selection, in collaboration with Edith Head, Hollywood designer.

Her first novel, *Women Inc.*, won an Indiana University Writers' Conference prize. In 1952, her novel *Julie*, published by McGraw-Hill, was a Literary Guild selection.

Mrs. Ardmore now lives in Los Angeles with her husband and her daughter Ellen, who has just entered first grade.

(continued from front flap)

The self-enchanted . . . ?

"Mae, you're gonna be a Persian princess carried on stage wrapped in a rug! You're gonna dance beside a pool with a background of gold cloth!"

And Forty-second Street was so jammed that night, they had to delay curtain time. From then on, it was Hollywood, Adolph Zukor, Wallace Reid, *The Plow Girl*, *Her Body in Bond*, *The Scarlet Shadow*, Armistice Day!, the twenties, Paris, Mary and Doug, John Gilbert, Erich Von Stroheim, and the spectacular *Merry Widow*.

"She arrived at the studio in her Rolls Royce with two men in cream and black uniforms sitting on the box. The lap rug was of sables; the interior was fitted with solid gold and cloisonné."

Garbo, Buster Keaton, Pola Negri, bull-fights in Spain, a contract in Germany (had all of Berlin turned out to welcome her?), Mr. Hearst's "ranch," box-office queen *assoluta* at MGM, and a persistent young man named Prince David Mdivani who married her. More applause. More dancing. But the publicity was unbearable, and they fled to Europe. Somehow Mae lost control of her vast fortune. She was black-balled in Hollywood. Her son Koran was born, and estranged from her even before her divorce. But there were still some dancing tours—Omaha, Kansas City, Memphis. She sold her house and lost custody of her son. There was finally an evening in Central Park when a forgotten woman with only a hat box beside her on the bench heard a passing messenger boy absently whistling "The Merry Widow" waltz.

It was Mae Murray, all right, but this time it was a very real sunset she had to walk into, carrying with her the dancing shadows of an era that had gone forever. *The Self-Enchanted*, told by a gifted writer who knows the milieu and the volatile, elusive, almost legendary Mae Murray, lights the darkened theaters once more with all the drama and excitement of a glorious, vanished time.



"They were to film the waltz through a crowd of a thousand extras while she and John Gilbert came closer and closer to the camera and he bent her back. They dipped, swayed, moved in beautiful rhythm, his eyes never leaving hers."

JANE ARDMORE, who has written the highly successful biographies of both Eddie Cantor and Edith Head, is a skilled and sensitive author. Through this dramatic, warm, and thoroughly realistic biography set in a fabulous era of make-believe, she shows Mae Murray as the true image and symbol of the self-enchanted 1920 Hollywood. It is a book rich in authentic silent-film lore and a Broadway scene that is re-created here with excitement and nostalgia.



"John Gilbert was behaving magnificently before the cameras in The Merry Widow. There was a scene where he tries to seduce her, then discovers her innocence. He took her in his arms with all the passion you could ask. She leaned against the wall, shaken, afterwards."



Gay, romantic, The Merry Widow was glorious from beginning to end, all debauchery gone, just the subtler touches to indicate the powers of evil. Certainly it was the most sophisticated love story ever seen."

McGRAW-HILL
BOOK COMPANY, Inc.
330 West 42d Street
New York 36, New York